

Administration of Barack H. Obama, 2009

Remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner

May 9, 2009

Thank you. Thank you, everybody. Good evening. You know, I had an entire speech prepared for this wonderful occasion, but now that I'm here, I think I'm going to try something a little different. Tonight I want to speak from the heart; I'm going to speak off the cuff.

[At this point, two teleprompters appeared, followed by laughter and applause.]

Good evening. *[Laughter]* Pause for laughter. *[Laughter]* Wait a minute. This may not be working as well as I—*[laughter]*. Let me try that again.

Good evening, everybody. I would like to welcome you all to the 10-day anniversary of my first 100 days. *[Laughter]* I am Barack Obama. Most of you covered me; all of you voted for me. *[Laughter]* Apologies to the FOX table. *[Laughter]* They're—where are they? I have to confess, I really did not want to be here tonight, but I knew I had to come—just one more problem that I've inherited from George W. Bush. *[Laughter]*

But now that I'm here, it's great to be here. It's great to see all of you. Michelle Obama is here, First Lady of the United States. Hasn't she been an outstanding First Lady? She's even begun to bridge the differences that have divided us for so long, because no matter which party you belong to, we can all agree that Michelle has the right to bear arms. *[Laughter]*

Now, Sasha and Malia aren't here tonight because they're grounded. You can't just take Air Force One on a joy ride to Manhattan. *[Laughter]* I don't care whose kids you are. *[Laughter]* We've been setting some ground rules here. They're starting to get a little carried away.

And—now, speaking—when I think about children, obviously, I think about Michelle, and it reminds me that tomorrow is Mother's Day. Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers in the audience. I do have to say, though, that this is a tough holiday for Rahm Emanuel because he's not used to saying the word "day" after "mother." *[Laughter]* That's true. *[Laughter]*

David Axelrod is here. You know, David and I have been together for a long time. I can still remember—I got to sort of—I tear up a little bit when I think back to that day that I called Ax so many years ago and said, "You and I can do wonderful things together." And he said to me the same thing that partners all across America are saying to one another right now: "Let's go to Iowa and make it official." *[Laughter]*

Michael Steele is in the house tonight, or as he would say, "in the heezy." *[Laughter]* What's up? *[Laughter]* Where is Michael? Is he—Michael, for the last time, the Republican Party does not qualify for a bailout. *[Laughter]* Rush Limbaugh does not count as a troubled asset, I'm sorry. *[Laughter]*

Dick Cheney was supposed to be here, but he is very busy working on his memoirs, tentatively titled, "How to Shoot Friends and Interrogate People." *[Laughter]*

You know, it's been a whirlwind of activity these first 100 days. We've enacted a major economic recovery package; we passed a budget; we forged a new path in Iraq; and no President in history has ever named three Commerce Secretaries this quickly. *[Laughter]* Which reminds me, if Judd Gregg is here, your business cards are ready now. *[Laughter]*

On top of that, I've also reversed the ban on stem cell research, signed an expansion of the children's health insurance. And just last week, Car and Driver named me auto executive of the year. *[Laughter]* Something I'm very proud of.

We've also begun to change the culture in Washington. We've even made the White House a place where people can learn and can grow. Just recently, Larry Summers asked if he could chair the White House Council on Women and Girls. *[Laughter]* And I do appreciate that Larry is here tonight because it is 7 hours past his bedtime. *[Laughter]* Gibbs liked that one. *[Laughter]*

In the last 100 days, we've also grown the Democratic Party by infusing it with new energy and bringing in fresh, young faces like Arlen Specter. *[Laughter]* Now, Joe Biden rightly deserves a lot of credit for convincing Arlen to make the switch, but Secretary Clinton actually had a lot to do with it too. One day she just pulled him aside, and she said, "Arlen, you know what I always say: 'If you can't beat them, join them.' " *[Laughter]*

Which brings me to another thing that's changed in this new, warmer, fuzzier White House, and that's my relationship with Hillary. You know, we had been rivals during the campaign, but these days we could not be closer. In fact, the second she got back from Mexico she pulled me into a hug and gave me a big kiss. *[Laughter]* Told me I'd better get down there myself—*[laughter]*—which I really appreciated. I mean, it was nice. *[Laughter]*

And of course, we've also begun to change America's image in the world. We talked about this during this campaign, and we're starting to execute. We've renewed alliances with important partners and friends.

[A photo was shown.]

If you look on the screen there, there I am with Japanese Prime Minister Taro Aso.

[A second photo was shown.]

There I am with Gordon Brown.

But as I said during the campaign, we can't just talk to our friends. As hard as it is, we also have to talk to our enemies, and I've begun to do exactly that.

[A third photo was shown of President Obama talking to a pirate.]

Take a look at the monitor there. *[Laughter]*

Now, let me be clear: Just because he handed me a copy of "Peter Pan" does not mean that I'm going to read it—*[laughter]*—but it's good diplomatic practice to just accept these gifts.

All this change hasn't been easy. Change never is. So I've cut the tension by bringing a new friend to the White House. He's warm; he's cuddly, loyal, enthusiastic. You just have to keep him on a tight leash. Every once in a while he goes charging off in the wrong direction and gets himself into trouble, but enough about Joe Biden. *[Laughter]*

All in all, we're proud of the change we've brought to Washington in these first 100 days, but we've got a lot of work left to do, as all of you know. So I'd like to talk a little bit about what my administration plans to achieve in the next 100 days.

During the second 100 days, we will design, build, and open a library dedicated to my first 100 days. *[Laughter]* It's going to be big, folks. *[Laughter]* In the next 100 days, I will learn to go off the prompter and Joe Biden will learn to stay on the prompter. *[Laughter]*

In the next 100 days, our bipartisan outreach will be so successful that even John Boehner will consider becoming a Democrat. After all, we have a lot in common. He is a person of color—[laughter]—although not a color that appears in the natural world. [Laughter] What's up, John? [Laughter]

In the next 100 days, I will meet with a leader who rules over millions with an iron fist, who owns the airwaves, and uses his power to crush all who would challenge his authority at the ballot box. It's good to see you, Mayor Bloomberg. [Laughter]

In the next 100 days, we will housetrain our dog, Bo, because the last thing Tim Geithner needs is someone else treating him like a fire hydrant. [Laughter] In the next 100 days, I will strongly consider losing my cool. [Laughter]

Finally, I believe that my next 100 days will be so successful I will be able to complete them in 72 days. [Laughter] And on the 73d day, I will rest. [Laughter]

I just—I want to end by saying a few words about the men and women in this room whose job it is to inform the public and pursue the truth. You know, we meet tonight at a moment of extraordinary challenge for this Nation and for the world, but it's also a time of real hardship for the field of journalism. And like so many other businesses in this global age, you've seen sweeping changes and technology and communications that lead to a sense of uncertainty and anxiety about what the future will hold.

Across the country, there are extraordinary, hard-working journalists who have lost their jobs in recent days, recent weeks, recent months. And I know that each newspaper and media outlet is wrestling with how to respond to these changes, and some are struggling simply to stay open. And it won't be easy. Not every ending will be a happy one.

But it's also true that your ultimate success as an industry is essential to the success of our democracy. It's what makes this thing work. You know, Thomas Jefferson once said that if he had the choice between a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, he would not hesitate to choose the latter.

And clearly, Thomas Jefferson never had cable news to contend with—[laughter]—but his central point remains: A government without newspapers, a government without a tough and vibrant media of all sorts, is not an option for the United States of America.

So I may not agree with everything you write or report. I may even complain, or more likely Gibbs will complain, from time to time about how you do your jobs, but I do so with the knowledge that when you are at your best, then you help me be at my best. You help all of us who serve at the pleasure of the American people do our jobs better by holding us accountable, by demanding honesty, by preventing us from taking shortcuts and falling into easy political games that people are so desperately weary of.

And that kind of reporting is worth preserving, not just for your sake, but for the public's. We count on you to help us make sense of a complex world and tell the stories of our lives the way they happen, and we look for you for truth, even if it's always an approximation, even if—[laughter].

This is a season of renewal and reinvention. That is what government must learn to do; that's what businesses must learn to do; and that's what journalism is in the process of doing. And when I look out at this room and think about the dedicated men and women whose questions I've answered over the last few years, I know that for all the challenges this industry faces, it's not short on talent or creativity or passion or commitment. It's not short of young

people who are eager to break news or the not-so-young who still manage to ask the tough ones time and time again. These qualities alone will not solve all your problems, but they certainly prove that the problems are worth solving. And that is a good place as any to begin.

So I offer you my thanks, I offer you my support, and I look forward to working with you and answering to you and the American people as we seek a more perfect union in the months and years ahead.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:56 p.m. at the Washington Hilton Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to White House Chief of Staff Rahm Emanuel; David Axelrod, Senior Adviser to the President; Michael S. Steele, chairman, Republican National Committee; radio show host Rush Limbaugh; former Vice President Richard B. Cheney; Lawrence H. Summers, Director, National Economic Council; White House Press Secretary Robert L. Gibbs; Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; Prime Minister Gordon Brown of the United Kingdom; Mayor Michael R. Bloomberg of New York City, NY; and Secretary of the Treasury Timothy F. Geithner. These remarks were released by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 10.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : White House Correspondents' Association dinner.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Aso, Taro; Axelrod, David; Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Bloomberg, Michael R.; Boehner, John A.; Brown, Gordon; Bush, George W.; Cheney, Richard B.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Emanuel, Rahm; Geithner, Timothy F.; Gibbs, Robert L.; Gregg, Judd A.; Limbaugh, Rush; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Specter, Arlen; Steele, Michael S.; Summers, Lawrence H.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Fiscal year 2010 budget; Business and industry : Newspaper industry, decline; Civil rights : Freedom of the press; Economy, national : American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009; Employment and unemployment : Job losses; Health and Human Services, Department of : State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP); Iraq : U.S. military forces :: Deployment; Japan : Prime Minister; Mother's Day; New York : New York City :: Mayor; Pennsylvania : U.S. Senator, decision to switch political parties; Science and technology : Stem cell research; State, Department of : Secretary; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary; United Kingdom : Prime Minister; White House Correspondents' Association; White House Office : Vice President.

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