

Administration of Barack Obama, 2014

Remarks at the White House Correspondents' Association Dinner

May 3, 2014

The President. Thank you so much. Everybody, have a seat, have a seat. Before I get started, can we get the new Presidential setup out here?

[At this point, aides placed two fern plants beside the podium.]

It's worked before. *[Laughter]* That's more like it.

It is great to be back. What a year, huh? I usually start these dinners with a few self-deprecating jokes. After my stellar 2013, what could I possibly talk about? *[Laughter]*

I admit it, last year was rough. Sheesh. *[Laughter]* At one point, things got so bad, the 47 percent called Mitt Romney to apologize. *[Laughter]*

Of course, we rolled out healthcare.gov. That could have gone better. *[Laughter]* In 2008, my slogan was, "Yes, we can." In 2013, my slogan was, "Control-Alt-Delete." *[Laughter]* On the plus side, they did turn the launch of healthcare.gov into one of the year's biggest movies. *[Laughter]*

[An image of the title of the Walt Disney Co. film "Frozen" was shown.]

But rather than dwell on the past, I would like to pivot to this dinner. Let's welcome our headliner this evening, Joel McHale. On "Community," Joel plays a preening, self-obsessed narcissist. So this diner must be a real change of pace for you. *[Laughter]*

I want to thank the White House Correspondents' Association for hosting us here tonight. I am happy to be here, even though I am a little jetlagged from my trip to Malaysia. The lengths we have to go to get CNN coverage these days. *[Laughter]* I think they're still searching for their table. *[Laughter]*

MSNBC is here. They're a little overwhelmed. *[Laughter]* They've never seen an audience this big before. *[Laughter]*

But look, everybody is trying to keep up with this incredibly fast-changing media landscape. For example, I got a lot of grief on cable news for promoting Obamacare to young people on "Between Two Ferns." But that's what young people like to watch. And to be fair, I am not the first person on television between two potted plants. *[Laughter]*

[An image of Elizabeth Hasselbeck, cohost of the FOX News program "FOX & Friends," seated between cohosts Steve Doocy and Brian Kilmeade was shown.]

Sometimes, I do feel disrespected by you reporters. But that's okay. Seattle Seahawk cornerback Richard Sherman is here tonight. And he gave me some great tips on how to handle it. Jake Tapper, don't you ever talk about me like that! *[Laughter]* I'm the best President in the game! *[Laughter]*

What do you think, Richard? Was that good? A little more feeling next time? While we're talking sports, just last month, a wonderful story, an American won the Boston Marathon for first time in 30 years. Which was inspiring and only fair, since a Kenyan has been President for the last 6. *[Laughter]* We had to even things out. *[Laughter]*

We have some other athletes here tonight, including Olympic snowboarding gold medalist Jamie Anderson is here. We're proud of her. Incredibly talented young lady. Michelle and I watched the Olympics. We cannot believe what these folks do, death-defying feats. Haven't seen somebody pull a 180 that fast since Rand Paul disinvited that Nevada rancher from this dinner. *[Laughter]* As a general rule, things don't end well if the sentence starts, "Let me tell you something I know about the Negro." *[Laughter]* You don't really need to hear the rest of it. *[Laughter]* Just a tip for you: Don't start your sentence that way. *[Laughter]*

Speaking of Rand Paul—*[laughter]*—Colorado legalized marijuana this year, an interesting social experiment. I do hope it doesn't lead to a whole lot of paranoid people who think that the Federal Government is out to get them and listening to their phone calls. *[Laughter]* That would be a problem. *[Laughter]*

And speaking of conservative heroes, the Koch brothers bought a table here tonight. But as usual, they used a shadowy right-wing organization as a front. Hello, FOX News. *[Laughter]* I'm just kidding. Let's face it, FOX, you'll miss me when I'm gone. *[Laughter]* It will be harder to convince the American people that Hillary was born in Kenya. *[Laughter]*

A lot of us really are concerned about the way big money is influencing our politics. I remember when a Super PAC was just me buying Marlboro 100s instead of regulars. *[Laughter]*

Of course, now that it's 2014, Washington is obsessed on the midterms. Folks are saying that with my sagging poll numbers, my fellow Democrats don't really want me campaigning with them. And I don't think that's true, although I did notice the other day that Sasha needed a speaker at career day, and she invited Bill Clinton. *[Laughter]* I was a little hurt by that. *[Laughter]*

Both sides are doing whatever it takes to win the ruthless game. Republicans—this is a true story—Republicans actually brought in a group of consultants to teach their candidates how to speak to women. This is true. And I don't know if it will work with women, but I understand that America's teenage boys are signing up to run for the Senate in droves. *[Laughter]*

Anyway, while you guys focus on the horserace, I'm going to do what I do: I'm going to be focused on everyday Americans. Just yesterday I read a heartbreaking letter—you know I get letters from folks from around the country; every day, I get 10 that I read—this one got to me: a Virginia man who's been stuck in the same part-time job for years, no respect from his boss, no chance to get ahead. I really wish Eric Cantor would stop writing me. *[Laughter]* You can just pick up the phone, Eric. *[Laughter]*

And I'm feeling sorry, believe it or not, for the Speaker of the House as well. These days, the House Republicans actually give John Boehner a harder time than they give me, which means orange really is the new black. *[Laughter]*

But I have not given up the idea of working with Congress. In fact, 2 weeks ago, Senator Ted Cruz and I, we got a bill done together. And I have to say, the signing ceremony was something special. We've got a picture of it, I think. *[Laughter]*

[An image of the President signing a bill, with Sen. R. Edward Cruz and Satan standing behind him and an icy landscape labeled "Hell" in the background, was shown.]

Look, I know, Washington seems more dysfunctional than ever. Gridlock has gotten so bad in this town you have to wonder: What did we do to piss off Chris Christie so bad? [Laughter]

One issue, for example, we haven't been able to agree on is unemployment insurance. Republicans continue to refuse to extend it. You know what? I am beginning to think they've got a point. If you want to get paid while not working, you should have to run for Congress just like everybody else. [Laughter]

Of course, there is one thing that keeps Republicans busy. They have tried more than 50 times to repeal Obamacare. Despite that, 8 million people signed up for health care in the first open enrollment. Which does lead one to ask, how well does Obamacare have to work before you don't want to repeal it? What if everybody's cholesterol drops to 120? [Laughter] What if your yearly checkup came with tickets to a Clippers game? [Laughter] Not the old, Don Sterling Clippers, the new, Oprah Clippers. Would that be good enough? [Laughter] What if it gave Mitch McConnell a pulse? [Laughter] What is it going to take? [Laughter]

Anyway, this year, I've promised to use more executive actions to get things done without Congress. My critics call this the imperial Presidency. The truth is, I just show up every day in my office and do my job. I've got a picture of this, I think. [Laughter]

[An image of the President sitting in the Oval Office on a throne from the HBO program "Game of Thrones," with a crossbow on the coffee table in the foreground, was shown.]

You would think they'd appreciate a more assertive approach, considering that the new conservative darling is none other than Vladimir Putin. [Laughter] Last year, Pat Buchanan said Putin is "headed straight for the Nobel Peace Prize." He said this. Now, I know it sounds crazy, but to be fair, they give those to just about anybody these days. [Laughter] So it could happen.

But it's not just Pat. Rudy Giuliani said Putin is "what you call a leader." Mike Huckabee and Sean Hannity keep talking about his bare chest, which is kind of weird. [Laughter]

[An image depicting FOX News commentator Sean Hannity, former Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani of New York City, and former Gov. Michael D. Huckabee of Arkansas as teenage fans, with a poster of a shirtless President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia on the wall behind them, was shown.]

Look it up. They talk about it a lot. [Laughter]

It is strange to think that I have just 2½ years left in this office. Everywhere I look, there are reminders that I only hold this job temporarily. [Laughter]

[An image of moving boxes labeled "Hillary—Oval" and "Hold for Hillary" stacked on top of the President's desk in the Oval Office was shown.]

But it's a long time between now and 2016, and anything can happen. You may have heard the other day, Hillary had to dodge a flying shoe at a press conference. [Laughter]

[An image of Vice President Joe Biden holding a shoe was shown.]

I love that picture. [Laughter]

Regardless of what happens, I've run my last campaign, and I'm beginning to think about my legacy. Some of you know Mayor Rahm Emanuel recently announced he is naming a high

school in Chicago after me, which is extremely humbling. I was even more flattered to hear Rick Perry, who is here tonight, is doing the same thing in Texas. Take a look. [Laughter]

[An image of a high school was shown. A sign in the foreground reads: "Raging Socialist Preparatory School. Home of the 'Fighting Chomskys.' Bake Sale Tuesday. All Proceeds Will Be Divided Equally."]

Thank you, Rick. It means a lot to me. [Laughter]

And I intend to enjoy all the free time that I will have. George W. Bush took up painting after he left office, which inspired me to take up my own artistic side. [Laughter] I'm sure we've got a shot of this. [Laughter] Maybe not. The joke doesn't work without the slide. [Laughter] Oh well. Assume that it was funny. [Laughter] Does this happen to you, Joel? It does, okay.

On a more serious note, tonight reminds us that we really are lucky to live in a country where reporters get to give a head of state a hard time on a daily basis, and then, once a year, give him or her the chance, at least, to try to return the favor.

But we also know that not every journalist or photographer or crewmember is so fortunate, because even as we celebrate the free press tonight, our thoughts are with those in places around the globe, like Ukraine and Afghanistan and Syria and Egypt, who risk everything—in some cases, even give their lives—to report the news.

And what tonight also reminds us is that the fight for full and fair access goes beyond the chance to ask a question. As Steve mentioned, decades ago, an African American who wanted to cover his or her President might be barred from journalism school, burdened by Jim Crow, and, once in Washington, banned from press conferences. But after years of effort, Black editors and publishers began meeting with FDR's Press Secretary, Steve Early. And then they met with the President himself, who declared that a Black reporter would get a credential. And even when Harry McAlpin made history as the first African American to attend a Presidential news conference, he wasn't always welcomed by the other reporters. But he was welcomed by the President, who told him, "I'm glad to see you, McAlpin, and I'm very happy to have you here."

Now, that sentiment might have worn off once Harry asked him a question or two—[laughter]—and Harry's battles continued. But he made history. And we're so proud of Sherman and his family for being here tonight and the White House Correspondents' Association for creating a scholarship in Harry's name.

For over 100 years, even as the White House Correspondents' Association has told the story of America's progress, you've lived it too, gradually allowing equal access to women and minorities and gays and Americans with disabilities and, yes, radio and television and Internet reporters as well. And through it all, you've helped make sure that even as societies change, our fundamental commitment to the interaction between those who govern and those who ask questions doesn't change. And as Jay will attest, it's a legacy you carry on enthusiastically every single day.

And because this is the 100th anniversary of the Correspondents' Association, I actually recorded an additional brief video thanking all of you for your hard work. Can we run the video?

[A video of the President speaking began, but then malfunctioned.]

The President. What's going on? [Laughter] I was told this would work. Does anybody know how to fix this? [Laughter]

[Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius entered the stage.]

The President. Oh, thank you. [Laughter] You got it?

Secretary Sebelius. I got this. I see it all the time. There, that should work.

[The video played. In it, the President made brief remarks as follows.]

The President. Congratulations to the White House Correspondents' Association. Here's to a hundred more terrific years.

[The President resumed his live remarks as follows.]

The President. Thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. And God bless America, and thank you, Kathleen Sebelius.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:21 p.m. at the Washington Hilton hotel. In his remarks, he referred to W. Mitt Romney, 2012 Republican Presidential nominee; Jake Tapper, chief Washington correspondent and anchor, CNN's "The Lead With Jake Tapper" program; Mebrahtom Keflezighi, winner of the 2014 Boston Marathon; Cliven Bundy, a Nevada rancher who led an armed confrontation with Federal rangers over a grazing rights dispute in April; Charles G. Koch, chief executive officer and chairman of the board, and David H. Koch, executive vice president, Koch Industries, Inc.; former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; Gov. Christopher J. Christie of New Jersey; Donald Sterling, owner, National Basketball Association's Los Angeles Clippers; Oprah Winfrey, chairman and chief executive officer, HARPO Entertainment Group; political commentator and author Patrick J. Buchanan; Gov. J. Richard Perry of Texas; Steve Thomma, president, White House Correspondents' Association; Sherman McAlpin, son of the late White House correspondent and civil rights activist Harry S. McAlpin; and White House Press Secretary James F. "Jay" Carney.

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Names: Anderson, Jamie L.; Boehner, John A.; Buchanan, Patrick J.; Bundy, Cliven; Bush, George W.; Cantor, Eric I.; Carney, James F. "Jay"; Christie, Christopher J.; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Clinton, William J.; Cruz, R. Edward; Emanuel, Rahm I.; Giuliani, Rudolph W.; Hannity, Sean; Huckabee, Michael D.; Keflezighi, Mebrahtom; Koch, Charles G.; Koch, David H.; McAlpin, Sherman; McConnell, A. Mitchell; McHale, Joel E.; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Paul, Rand; Perry, J. Richard; Putin, Vladimir Vladimirovich; Romney, W. Mitt; Sebelius, Kathleen; Sherman, Richard K.; Sterling, Donald T.; Tapper, Jake; Thomma, Steve; Winfrey, Oprah G.

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