

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

Remarks Prior to a Cabinet Meeting
February 3, 2015

This is my first opportunity to bring all the Cabinet here together for this year. And I, first of all, am going to be thanking all of them for the outstanding work they did last year to make 2014 a breakthrough year for America. What we saw was job growth, unemployment coming down, energy production up, clean energy production up, reduction in deficits, continued expansion of exports.

And as I said at the State of the Union, we are now poised to not just have recovered from the recession, but really to move forward in the 21st century in a better position than just about any country on Earth. But that requires we make some smart choices. Are we going to have a country where just a few do spectacularly well, or are we going to have a country where prosperity is broad based and we're making sure everybody has got a shot if they're willing to work hard? And that middle class economics is going to be a central theme of the work that every single agency does not just in the coming weeks or in the coming months, but for the remainder of my Presidency.

The budget that we put forward reflects those priorities. It makes sure that we're investing in infrastructure, in research, to continue to make us grow. It makes sure that we are providing tax credits and tax breaks to middle class families for their childcare expenses, to make sure that they're able to afford college educations for their kids. That includes the proposal I put forward for free community college, which can reduce the debt burdens for young people who know that they need the skills to succeed in the 21st century.

It's fully paid for through smart spending cuts, as well as tax reforms. It fully reverses the arbitrary cuts of recent years to domestic priorities in 2016 with dollar-for-dollar increases for defense. It's full of ideas that Republicans should embrace, like cutting taxes for middle class families. And one idea that they need to embrace right away is making sure that we're funding the Department of Homeland Security.

I talked about this yesterday; I want to reemphasize it today: The Department of Homeland Security contains numerous agencies that every single day are keeping the American people safe. They're our front lines at our borders, at our airports, along our coasts. And they need certainty in order to do their jobs. The notion that we would risk the effectiveness of the department that is charged with preventing terrorism, controlling our borders, making sure that the American people are safe, makes absolutely no sense. The idea that we would have members of the Coast Guard or our Border Control or TSA not being paid, and expect them to still be able to perform as effectively as we need them to perform, makes no sense. And the idea that we would do that because of a separate disagreement between myself and the Republicans about the need for comprehensive immigration reform, certainly is something that is not going to make sense to the American people.

So I'm encouraging Congress to go ahead and get a budget done for the Department of Homeland Security, make sure it's properly funded. And then, I'm looking forward to engaging with all of them so that we can make sure that we've got a Government that is delivering for the American people and making sure that we are giving middle class families and everybody who's willing to work hard to get into the middle class the chance to get ahead.

And we're also going to have an opportunity in our Cabinet to talk about some administrative actions that we're taking to continue to make Government more efficient, more effective, and more customer friendly. And we've made some real progress on that front in every single agency, from the Veterans Administration to the Small Business Administration. I'm really excited about some of the things that we're going to be doing, saving taxpayers money and making sure that our organizations are tight, streamlined, and effective.

So I appreciate all the good work that all of you are doing. And I want to thank our press pool very much so we can get to work.

Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:13 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House.

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