

But I have to say that the American people are absolutely clear that this won't be easy but that the road that we have traveled doesn't just stretch back through the 6 months of my administration, it stretches back year after year, decade after decade, through all the times that Washington has failed to tackle this problem.

Time and again, we've heard excuses to delay and defeat reform. Time and again, the American people have suffered because people in Washington played the politics of the moment instead of putting the interests of the American people first. That's how we ended up with premiums rising three times faster than wages. That's how we ended up with businesses choosing between shedding benefits and shutting their doors. That's how we've been burdened with runaway costs and huge gaps in coverage.

That's the status quo. That's what we have right now. And the American people understand that the status quo is unacceptable. They don't care who's up or who's down politically in Washington; they care about what's going on in their own lives. They don't care about the latest line of political attack; they care about whether their families will be crushed by rising premiums, whether the businesses they work for will have to cut jobs, or whether their children are going to be saddled with debt.

So I understand that some will try to delay action until the special interests can kill it, while others will simply focus on scoring political points. We've done that before. And we can choose to follow that playbook again, and then we'll never get over the goal line, and we'll face an even greater crisis in the years to come. That's one path we can travel.

Or we can come together and insist that this time it will be different. We can choose action over inaction. We can choose progress over the politics of the moment. We can build on the extraordinary common ground that's been forged, and we can do the hard work needed to finally pass the health insurance reform that the American people deserve.

And I can guarantee you that when we do pass this bill, history won't record the demands for endless delay or endless debates in the news cycle, it will record the hard work done by the Members of Congress to pass the bill and the fact that the people who sent us here to Washington insisted upon change. That's the work that we've come here to do, and I look forward to working with Congress in the days ahead to getting the job done.

Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:50 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House.

## Remarks at a White House Event Celebrating Country Music July 21, 2009

Welcome to the White House. Tonight marks the second in a series of—that we are using to celebrate the music that's contributed to the life of this Nation and chronicled the history of our people. We began this tradition last month with an evening of jazz. And tonight we celebrate another uniquely American art form: country music.

We are thrilled and honored to be joined by three of country music's biggest acts, three of music's biggest acts, period: Alison Krauss and Union Station, Brad Paisley, and Charley Pride. And I want to thank and applaud Alison and Brad for taking some time earlier today to lead a country music workshop here at the

White House for the next generation of young musicians.

Now, I know folks think I'm a city boy—[laughter]—but I do appreciate listening to country music because like all Americans, I appreciate the broad and indelible impact that country has had on our Nation. It's touched countless lives; it's influenced all genres of music; it's helped us make the American people more hopeful; it's captured our restlessness and resilience, and told so much of our story in the process.

After all, that's what country music is all about: storytelling. It's about folks telling their life story the best way they know how: stories

of love and longing, hope and heartbreak, pride and pain. Stories that help us celebrate the good times and get over the bad times. Stories that are quintessentially American. After all, name me any other country that would have produced a Hank Williams or a Willie Nelson. [Laughter]

And like all great art, a great country song also has a commitment to truth, to telling the truth like it is, without pulling any punches. And generations of performers have honored that commitment. Harlan Howard proclaimed country music “three chords and the truth.” [Laughter] Garth Brooks said it’s “honesty, sincerity, and real life to the hilt.” And Dierks

Bentley called it “the best shrink that 15 bucks can buy.” [Laughter]

So to all those watching, either here or at home, here’s a free session with some of the best storytellers and truthsellers around. We hope that you have a wonderful time this evening. Thank you. Enjoy.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:36 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to entertainers Alison Krauss and Union Station, Brad Paisley, Charley Pride, Willie Nelson, Garth Brooks, and Dierks Bentley.

## The President’s News Conference With Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki of Iraq July 22, 2009

*President Obama.* Good afternoon, everybody. I am very pleased to welcome Prime Minister al-Maliki back to Washington. We’ve just concluded a very productive discussion about a wide range of issues.

We meet at an important moment. Substantial progress has been made since Prime Minister Maliki’s first visit to Washington in 2006 and since the Prime Minister and I had a chance to sit down together in Baghdad. Violence continues to be down, and Iraqis are taking responsibility for their future. This progress has been made possible by the resilience of the Iraqi people and security forces and also because of the extraordinary service of American troops and civilians in Iraq.

Now we’re in the midst of a full transition to Iraqi responsibility and to a comprehensive partnership between the United States and Iraq based on mutual interests and mutual respect. The success of this transition is critically important to the security and prosperity of our people, and it is a top priority of my administration.

Now, recently, we took an important step forward by transferring control of all Iraqi cities and towns to Iraq’s security forces. This transition was part of our security agreement and should send an unmistakable signal that we will keep our commitments with the sovereign Iraqi Government. As I said before, we seek no bases

in Iraq, nor do we make any claim on Iraq’s territory or resources.

Going forward, we will continue to provide training and support for Iraqi security forces that are capable and nonsectarian. We’ll move forward with our strategy to responsibly remove all American combat brigades from Iraq by the end of next August and to fulfill our commitment to remove all American troops from Iraq by the end of 2011.

As we move forward, Prime Minister Maliki and I have no doubt that there will be some tough days ahead. There will be attacks on Iraqi security forces and the American troops supporting them. There are still those in Iraq who would murder innocent men, women, and children. There are still those who want to foment sectarian conflict. But make no mistake: Those efforts will fail.

The Iraqi people have already rejected these forces of division and destruction. And American troops have the capability, the support, and flexibility they need to stand with our Iraqi partners on behalf of a sovereign, secure, and self-reliant Iraq. Because we believe that the future does not belong to those who would destroy; it belongs to those who would build.

To that end, America strongly supports efforts by the Iraqi Government to promote national unity, which will help ensure that people in all parts of Iraq can live in peace and