

Remarks on H1N1 Influenza Preparedness and Response *September 1, 2009*

Good afternoon, everybody. Before I say a few words about the meeting we just had, I'd like to mention some good news that came out today about our economy. Now, for the first time in 18 months, our manufacturing sector has expanded, and the statistics used to measure manufacturing output is the highest it's been in over 2 years.

This means greater production of transportation equipment like cars and electronic equipment like computers and appliances, and it means these companies are starting to invest more and produce more, and it is a sign that we're on the path to economic recovery.

And there's no doubt that we have a long way to go, and I and the other members of this administration will not let up until those Americans who are looking for jobs can find them. But this is another important sign that we're heading in the right direction and that the steps we've taken to bring our economy back from the brink are working.

Now, we just had a good meeting about our ongoing efforts to prepare this country for the H1N1 flu virus this fall. And I want to thank John Brennan; our CDC Director, Tom Frieden; and Secretaries Sebelius, Napolitano, Duncan, and Locke for all the good work that they've been doing to get us ready today.

As I said when we saw the first cases of this virus back in the spring, I don't want anybody to be alarmed, but I do want everybody to be prepared. We know that we usually get a second, larger wave of these flu viruses in the fall, and so response plans have been put in place across all levels of government. Our plans and decisions are based on the best scientific information available, and as the situation changes, we will continue to update the public.

And we're also making steady progress on developing a safe and effective H1N1 flu vaccine, and we expect a flu shot program will begin soon. This program will be completely voluntary, but it will be strongly recommended.

For all that we do in the Federal Government, however, every American has a role to

play in responding to this virus. We need State and local governments on the frontlines to make antiviral medications and vaccines available and be ready to take whatever steps are necessary to support the health care system. We need hospitals and health care providers to continue preparing for an increased patient load and to take steps to protect health care workers. We need families and businesses to ensure that they have plans in place if a family member, a child, or a coworker contracts the flu and needs to stay home.

And most importantly, we need everyone to get informed about individual risk factors, and we need everyone to take the commonsense steps that we know can make a difference. Stay home if you're sick; wash your hands frequently; cover your sneezes with your sleeve, not your hands; and take all the necessary precautions to stay healthy. I know it sounds simple, but it's important, and it works. Finally, for people who want to learn more about this virus, please go to www.flu.gov or talk to your doctor.

I want to commend every member of our team. I think we've done an extraordinary job in preparing for this flu outbreak. We anticipate that there will be some issues coming up over the next several months. The way it's moving is still somewhat unpredictable, but what I'm absolutely confident about is that our team that's assembled here has done an extraordinary job in preparing for whatever may happen.

So we appreciate all of you for being here, and I want to publicly again thank you for all your extraordinarily hard work. All right.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:13 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism John O. Brennan; Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius; Secretary of Homeland Security Janet A. Napolitano; Secretary of Education Arne Duncan; and Secretary of Commerce Gary F. Locke.

Remarks at the Iftar Dinner September 1, 2009

The President. Please, everybody, have a seat. Thank you. Well, it is my great pleasure to host all of you here at the White House to mark this special occasion. *Ramadan Kareem.*

Audience members. *Ramadan Kareem.*

The President. I want to say that I'm deeply honored to welcome so many members of the diplomatic corps, as well as several members of my administration and distinguished Members of Congress, including the first two Muslims to serve in Congress, Keith Ellison and Andre Carson. Where are they? Give them a big round of applause.

Just a few other acknowledgements I want to make. We have Senator Richard Lugar here, who's our ranking member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Where is Dick Lugar? There he is; thank you. Representative John Conyers, chairman of the Judiciary Committee; Representative Rush Holt is here. Thank you, Rush. Have we found you a seat, Rush? [Laughter]

Representative Rush D. Holt. I'm on my way to the train. [Laughter]

The President. I got you. [Laughter]

Rep. Holt. Thank you, Mr. President.

The President. We also have here—Secretary of Defense Gates is here, Secretary Gates; our Attorney General, Eric Holder; and Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius is here.

And most of all, I want to welcome all the American Muslims from many walks of life who are here. This is just one part of our effort to celebrate Ramadan and continues a long tradition of hosting iftars here at the White House.

For well over a billion Muslims, Ramadan is a time of intense devotion and reflection. It's a time of service and support for those in need. And it is also a time for family and friends to come together in a celebration of their faith, their communities, and the common humanity that all of us share. It is in that spirit that I welcome each and every one of you to the White House.

Tonight's iftar is a ritual that is also being carried out this Ramadan at kitchen tables and mosques in all 50 States. Islam, as we know, is part of America. And like the broader American citizenry, the American Muslim community is one of extraordinary dynamism and diversity, with families that stretch back generations and more recent immigrants, with Muslims of countless races and ethnicities, and with roots in every corner of the world.

Indeed, the contribution of Muslims to the United States are too long to catalog because Muslims are so interwoven into the fabric of our communities and our country. American Muslims are successful in business and entertainment, in the arts and athletics, in science and in medicine. Above all, they are successful parents, good neighbors, and active citizens.

So on this occasion, we celebrate the holy month of Ramadan, and we also celebrate how much Muslims have enriched America and its culture, in ways both large and small. And with us here tonight, we see just a small sample of those contributions. Let me share a few stories with you briefly.

Elsheba Khan's son Kareem, made the ultimate sacrifice for his country when he lost his life in Iraq. Kareem joined the military as soon as he finished high school. He would go on to win the Purple Heart and Bronze Star, along with the admiration of his fellow soldiers. In describing her son, Elsheba said, "He always wanted to help any way that he could." Tonight, he's buried alongside thousands of heroes in Arlington National Cemetery. A crescent is carved into his grave, just as others bear the Christian cross or the Jewish star. These brave Americans are joined in death as they were in life, by a common commitment to their country and the values that we hold dear.

And one of those values is the freedom to practice your religion, a right that is enshrined in the First Amendment of the Constitution. Nashala Hearn, who joins us from Muskogee, Oklahoma, took a stand for that right at an early age. When her district—school district told her that she couldn't wear the *hijab*, she