

of a storm or other major impact on the Earth after the sky clears.

So there's a whole lot of details that we can see here from the space station and observe every day. We can see things—we pass over the same portion of the Earth every day, so it's a regular observation that we can make over a period—a long period of time as well.

*The President.* Well, listen, you guys have been extraordinarily generous with your time. I just want to repeat—and I think I speak for all the young people here and everybody back home—how proud we are of you, how excited we are about the work that's being done on the space station, and how committed we are to

continuing human space exploration in the future.

So you guys continue to be great pioneers and great role models for all of us, and we thank you for your courage. And tell your families we appreciate them letting you float up into space like this. [*Laughter*] All right?

Bye-bye, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:20 p.m. via satellite in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Stephen T. Colbert, host, Comedy Central's "The Colbert Report" program.

## Statement on the Observance of Ash Wednesday *February 17, 2010*

Michelle and I join Christians here in America and around the world in observing Ash Wednesday. We mark this solemn day of repen-

tance and promise knowing that Lent is a time for millions to renew faith and also deepen a commitment to loving and serving one another.

## Remarks on Signing an Executive Order Establishing the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform and an Exchange With Reporters *February 18, 2010*

*The President.* Hello, everybody. All right. Good morning, everybody. When I took office, America faced three closely linked challenges. One was a financial crisis brought on by reckless speculation that threatened to choke off all lending. And this helped to spark the deepest recession since the Great Depression, from which we're still recovering. That recession, in turn, helped to aggravate an already severe fiscal crisis brought on by years of bad habits in Washington.

Now, the economic crisis required the Government to make immediate emergency investments that added to our accumulated debt, critical investments that have helped to break the back of the recession and lay the groundwork for growth and job creation. But now, with so many Americans still out of work, the task of recovery is far from complete. So in the short term, we're going to be taking steps to encourage business to create jobs. That will continue to be my top priority. Still there's no doubt that

we're going to have to also address the long-term quandary of a Government that routinely and extravagantly spends more than it takes in. When I walked into the door of the White House, our Government was spending about 25 percent of GDP, but taking in only about 16 percent of GDP. Without action, the accumulated weight of that structural deficit, of ever-increasing debt, will hobble our economy, it will cloud our future, and it will saddle every child in America with an intolerable burden.

Now, this isn't news. Since the budget surpluses at the end of the 1990s, Federal debt has exploded. The trajectory is clear, and it is disturbing. But the politics of dealing with chronic deficits is fraught with hard choices, and therefore, it's treacherous to officeholders here in Washington. As a consequence, nobody's been too eager to deal with it.

That's where these two gentlemen come in. Alan Simpson and Erskine Bowles are taking on the impossible: They're going to try to restore