

time for talk is over. We need to see where people stand. And we need all of you to help us win that vote. So I need you to knock on doors, talk to your neighbors, pick up the phone. When you hear an argument by the water cooler and somebody is saying this or that about it, say, “No, no, no, hold on a second.” You—we—and we need you to make your voices heard all the way in Washington, DC.

They need to hear your voices, because right now the Washington echo chamber is in full throttle. It is as deafening as it’s ever been. And as we come to that final vote, that echo chamber’s telling Members of Congress, wait, think about the politics, instead of thinking about doing the right thing.

That’s what Mitch McConnell said this week-end. His main argument was, “Well, this is going to be really bad for Democrats politically.” Now, first of all, I generally wouldn’t take advice about what’s good for Democrats. [*Laughter*] But setting aside that, that’s not the issue here. The issue here is not the politics of it.

But that’s what people—that’s what Members of Congress are hearing right now on the cable shows and in the—sort of the gossip columns in Washington. It’s telling Congress, comprehensive reform’s failed before. Remember what happened to Clinton. It may just be too politically hard.

Yes, it’s hard. It is hard. That’s because health care is complicated. Health care is a hard issue. It’s easily misrepresented; it’s easily misunderstood. So it’s hard for some Members of Congress to make this vote. There’s no doubt about that. But you know what else is hard? What Leslie and her family are going through,

that’s hard. The possibility that Natoma Canfield might lose her house because she’s about to lose her health insurance, that’s hard. Laura Klitzka in Green Bay having to worry about her cancer and her debt at the same time, trying to explain that to her kids, that’s hard. What’s hard is what millions of families and small businesses are going through because we allow the insurance industry to run wild in this country.

So let me remind everybody: Those of us in public office were not sent to Washington to do what’s easy. We weren’t sent there because of the big fancy title. We weren’t sent there to—because of a big fancy office. We weren’t sent there just so everybody can say how wonderful we are. We were sent there to do what was hard. We were sent there to take on the tough issues. We were sent there to solve the big challenges. And that’s why we’re there. And at this moment, we are being called upon to fulfill our duty to the citizens of this Nation and to future generations.

So I’ll be honest with you. I don’t know how passing health care will play politically, but I do know that it’s the right thing to do. It’s right for our families. It’s right for our businesses. It’s right for the United States of America. And if you share that belief, I want you to stand with me and fight with me. And I ask you to help us get us over the finish line these next 2 weeks. The need is great. The opportunity’s here. Let’s seize reform. It’s within our grasp.

Thank you very much, everybody. God bless.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:23 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to author Leslie Esdaile Banks.

Remarks Honoring the 2009 NCAA Football Champion University of Alabama Crimson Tide

March 8, 2010

The President. Hello, everybody. Please have a seat. Have a seat, Crimson Tide.

Audience member. Go Tide!

The President. Go Tide. [*Laughter*] Well, welcome to the White House, and congratulations on your 13th—let me check that—13th

national championship, the first in 17 years. I think it’s safe to say that the Tide is back.

I’ve got to tell you, everyone was really excited about this team coming today, except for my Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs—[*laughter*]—because he was born and raised in Au-

burn. He's hiding in his office right now. [Laughter] But we do have some Tide fans here that are worth a little bit of acknowledgment.

I want to start by thanking Robert Witt, the president of the University of Alabama. I also want to acknowledge the mayor of Tuscaloosa, Walter Maddox. You can give them a round of applause. I want to recognize Senator Shelby and Senator Sessions, who are here. Stand up, please. And our terrific Surgeon General, who's an Alabama native, Regina Benjamin, is in the house. Where's Regina? There she is over there.

And to all those who make this program what it is—the students and the trainers and the staff and the ticket takers, fans in Tuscaloosa and all across the country—you should all be very proud, and I want to congratulate you.

Obviously, I want to congratulate Coach Saban and thank him and his wife Terry for being with us today. There is no question that this team is here in large part because of what Coach Saban has done. There aren't too many coaches in the country who have the knowledge, the motivational skills, the program discipline to win two national championships in 6 years, let alone at two different schools. And I think it's a testimony to his incredible skills as a coach.

I've got to congratulate Mark Ingram for becoming the first Heisman Trophy winner in Alabama history. [Applause] That's it. Mark rushed for over 1,500 yards last season, the most ever by a Crimson Tide running back. And I know his selflessness and dedication has made his team and his family very, very proud.

I also want to recognize your captains, Rolando McClain, Mike Johnson, and Javier Arenas, and all the upperclassmen for their leadership on this team. Congratulations to all of you. I especially want to congratulate Rolando for winning the Butkus Award as the Nation's top linebacker. And I know that part of Rolando's talent comes from his intelligence and his judgment. In fact, one of his teammates was asked to describe him. He said, "Just picture

Coach Saban being huge and being able to play football." [Laughter]

Now, one of the trademarks of this team has always been its unwavering focus on what's important. And I know shortly after the 2008 season ended, Coach hung a picture of the Florida Gators winning the national championship in the locker room—not too subtle what he was saying. He asked his players if they wanted to work hard enough to beat their teammates in a drill or if they wanted to work hard enough to be the best team in the country. And it's pretty clear what choice they made.

And that's the kind of tone this team sets, both on and off the field. It's why these young men—and this is something I'm very proud of—had the second highest graduation rate of any team ranked in the top 25. It shows that these guys have their priorities straight. Together, they contributed more than 3,500 hours of community service that Alabama students—student athletes performed last year.

And that spirit continued earlier today when the team met with a group of kids from one of DC's roughest neighborhoods and helped teach them about the importance of staying in school and making healthy choices. That's how champions act, in football and in life. As Coach Bryant once said, "I think the most important thing of all for any team is a winning attitude." I think this team would make him proud, because they've got that winning attitude.

So congratulations to all of you. The best of luck next season. I know spring practice starts on Friday—woo, man. [Laughter] Next Friday, huh? So enjoy these last few days off. [Laughter] And congratulations to all of you for just an extraordinary season. Roll Tide.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:59 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Mark Ingram, Jr., running back, Rolando McClain, linebacker, Michael P. Johnson, offensive lineman, and Javier E. Arenas, defensive back, University of Alabama football team.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Carlos Mauricio Funes Cartagena of El Salvador

March 8, 2010

President Obama. Hello, everybody. I want to welcome President Funes and the First Lady of El Salvador to the United States. *Bienvenido.* We are very grateful and honored by his visit. I've been following the President since his election 9 months ago and have been very favorably impressed by the steps that he's taking to try to break down political divisions within the country and move it forward with a spirit of progress and focusing on prosperity at every level of Salvadoran society.

Obviously, the friendship between our two countries in part is the result of the 2 million Salvadorans who are here in the United States working, sending remittances back to El Salvador. Those ties provide an outstanding foundation for continuing cooperation between our two countries.

That cooperation has to be based on mutual interest and mutual respect. We've discussed ways that we can continue to improve our trading relationship. Over half of El Salvador's exports go to the United States and over one-third of its imports come from the United States, so we already have strong economic ties there. But I very much applaud the President's vision that growth in El Salvador has to be balanced and reach all aspects of Salvadoran society, that it has to be socially inclusive. And we want to assist in any way we can in making sure that there's adequate credit and infrastructure and other tools that can bring about the long-term prosperity within El Salvador.

And there are some wonderful projects that we can do multilaterally. For example, I know the United States, Brazil, and El Salvador jointly are interested in pursuing additional measures that can expand biofuels and energy development that could be good for all three countries.

We also discussed security issues in the region. I think that there has been progress within Central America, but we still have concerns, obviously, about drug trafficking, about gangs. The security challenges, obviously, are connected to the economic challenges within the re-

gion, and we want to be supportive not only in addressing the symptoms that we see in terms of crime, but also the root causes, and I know that's something that the President cares deeply about as well.

And finally, I want to congratulate President Funes in the leadership that he's already shown both regionally and internationally. His pragmatic and wise approach to the situation in Honduras, I think, helped to contribute to a solution in that country that promises long-term stability and peace. The generosity of the Salvadoran people towards Haiti in the aftermath of the terrible earthquake there, I think, is another example of his vision for a region that supports each other.

And so my main goal today is communicating how interested the United States is in continuing to be an equal partner with El Salvador and other countries in the region, a relationship based on mutual interest and mutual respect. And I wish him all the best as he continues to pursue his goals for a more prosperous and secure El Salvador.

President Funes. Friends of the press, I am extremely surprised about this excellent summary. After 20 years of being a journalist, I thought that I could summarize our interview of more than an hour in a better way, but President Obama has surprised me in how he has summarized the meeting.

I would like to talk about two or three things. I have spoken to President Obama about this, and I want to commend him because he shares the same democratic values, and his new vision of how he is dealing with the hemisphere and particularly in Central America.

Traditionally, Central America has been seen as a migratory problem for the United States. But Central America, and in particularly El Salvador, needs to generate the opportunities of work in order to be able to keep people back in El Salvador. And as they have a better job generation and people have better health and education, people will be able to remain in the countries and have a better life.