

Remarks to the White House Press Pool and an Exchange With Reporters April 28, 2010

The President. I am very pleased that the United States Senate has decided to proceed to the financial regulatory bill by unanimous consent. It is the right thing to do. And I want to reiterate what I said earlier, that this shouldn't have to be a partisan issue. Republicans, Democrats, Independents, everybody was hurt by the crisis on Wall Street. It is something that we can prevent with some better rules of the road. And I hope that we can get this done quickly, reconcile it with the work that was done over on the House side, and that I can sign this bill into law very soon. But I want to congratulate the Senate on making progress on an issue that's vital to everybody in the country.

All right?

Financial Regulatory Reform

Q. Sir, Goldman Sachs says that they didn't do anything wrong with their past dealings during the hearings. Do you have any response to that?

The President. I don't want to comment on a pending case that's been brought by an independent agency. I will say that I think most Americans would say that some of the behavior generally on Wall Street, even if it's legal, doesn't seem to serve much of an economic purpose and puts, as we've discovered, the entire economy at risk. And the more that we can make sure there's transparency, openness, clarity about how the financial system's working, the more that we have, for example, higher capital requirements, less leverage in the system, it may be a little boring, it may reduce bonuses for some of the players on Wall Street, but we'll end up having a safer, more secure financial system. And I think banks and other financial institutions can get back to making money the old-fashioned way, which is by lending it to companies to build businesses and create jobs and do all the things that we want our financial system to do.

Arizona's Illegal Immigration Enforcement Legislation/U.S. Border Security/Immigration Reform

Q. Mr. President, can your administration do something to mitigate the effects of the Arizona immigration law?

The President. Well, we're examining it now. But as I said at that town hall meeting yesterday, I understand people's frustrations about the border. If you've got hundreds of thousands of people coming in, not playing by the rules, that's a problem. And the Federal Government has been abdicating on its responsibilities for a very long time on this issue. That's why I've called for comprehensive immigration reform, and I want that to proceed, and I want it to be done on a bipartisan basis.

What I think is a mistake is when we start having local law enforcement officials empowered to stop people on the suspicion that they may be undocumented workers, because that carries a great amount of risk that core values that we all care about are breached. And it's not just—this isn't just my opinion. You've seen a number of very prominent Republicans say that this is a problem.

So I understand the frustration of people in Arizona and the border States. We've ramped up border security. We've put in a lot of resources since I've become President. Our enforcement actions are up. And in fact, I've been attacked by immigration rights groups for being too tough on that front. But obviously, we've still got to do more. We have to do more, though, in the context of a comprehensive plan that maintains our status as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants. And this kinds—these kinds of shortcuts, I think, will end up polarizing the situation instead of solving the problem.

Supreme Court Nominations

Q. Is this one of the issues that's coming up in your discussions with some of the potential Supreme Court nominees?

The President. It is.

Q. Is immigration and the Arizona law something that's coming up in your discussions with possible nominees?

The President. I never ask Supreme Court nominees about specific cases that might go before them. I talk about their broader judicial philosophy.

Immigration Reform/Legislative Agenda

Q. Are you committed to pushing forward on immigration law this year?

The President. Well, I've made calls to Republicans to see if we can get them to join us. And this is a difficult issue. It generates a lot of emotions, and the politics are difficult. But I've been unwavering in saying what we need to do. I think that I can get a majority of Democrats to support a comprehensive approach. But I need some help on the Republican side. We had that kind of help a couple of years ago. Senator McCain was one of the leaders in that process. I gave him a lot of credit for it and still do.

And so the question is, can we get some movement on that front? Lindsey Graham has been in serious conversations with Senator Schumer. I appreciate his courage on that. And my hope is, is that we can get a working group that can move this forward so that we've got serious legislation that solves the border problem and solves the wide range of issues that we face under immigration reform in a way that can garner the support of the American people.

You notice in the town hall meeting yesterday, those folks aren't enthusiastic about illegal immigration. But when you lay it out for them, a sensible way of doing it—holding people who've broken the law responsible, securing our borders, but also recognizing we're not going to send millions of people back, many of whom have children who might be U.S. citizens, and that there should be a more sensible way of dealing with it—people understand that.

So it's a matter of political will. Now, look, we've gone through a very tough year, and I've been working Congress pretty hard, so I know there may not be an appetite immediately to dive into another controversial issue. There's still work that has to be done on energy, mid-

terms are coming up, so I don't want us to do something just for the sake of politics that doesn't solve the problem. I want us to get together, get the best ideas on both sides, work this through, and when it's ready to go, let's move. But I think we need to start a process, at least, to open up a smarter, better discussion than the one that is raging right now.

Okay? Thank you, guys. One more. I'll give him the last question since this is his first ride on the plane.

Criteria for Supreme Court Nominations

Q. Senator Leahy's been talking a lot about conservative judicial activism, and I wonder if you see that as a frame through which the new Supreme Court nomination and confirmation will be considered. You've talked about understanding the—

The President. Well, I mean, here's what I will say. It used to be that the notion of a activist judge was somebody who ignored the will of Congress, ignored democratic processes, and tried to impose judicial solutions on problems instead of letting the process work itself through politically. And in the sixties and seventies, the feeling was, is that liberals were guilty of that kind of approach.

What you're now seeing, I think, is a conservative jurisprudence that oftentimes makes the same error. And I think rather than a notion of judicial restraint, which should apply both to liberals and conservative jurists, what you're seeing is arguments about original intent and other legal theories that end up giving judges an awful lot of power, in fact, sometimes more power than duly elected representatives.

And so I'm not looking at this particular judicial nomination through that prism alone, but I think it is important for us to understand that judicial—the concept of judicial restraint cuts both ways. And the core understanding of judicial restraint is, is that, generally speaking, we should presume that the democratic processes and laws that are produced by the House and the Senate and State legislatures, et cetera, and the administrative process that goes with it is afforded some deference as long as core constitutional values are observed.

But I think that in and of itself is not the only criteria by which I'm making selections on judges.

All right? Thank you, guys.

President's Visit to Illinois

Q. How do you think the trip went? How did the trip go?

The President. I thought it was fun. I thought it was great. And it was a reminder that sometimes there's a mismatch between the way politics are portrayed in Washington and how people are feeling.

I think it's a less toxic atmosphere. People are genuinely concerned about jobs, or they've got serious questions about how the new

health care bill is going to work, what's happening with immigration, or other issues. But generally, I think what people are looking for is that their elected officials think about them first and foremost and are working hard. They realize that some of these problems are hard, that they're not going to be solved overnight. They just want to make sure that we're working on their behalf and not on behalf of either some ideological agenda or special interest in Washington. So I really enjoyed it. It took me back to my start in politics.

All right, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:52 p.m. aboard Air Force One en route to Andrews Air Force Base, MD.

Eulogy at a Funeral Service for Civil Rights Activist Dorothy I. Height
April 29, 2010

The President. Please be seated. Let me begin by saying a word to Dr. Dorothy Height's sister, Ms. Aldridge. To some she was a mentor, to all she was a friend, but to you she was family, and my family offers yours our sympathy for your loss.

We are gathered here today to celebrate the life and mourn the passing of Dr. Dorothy Height. It is fitting that we do so here, in our National Cathedral of Saint Peter and Saint Paul. Here in a place of great honor. Here in the House of God, surrounded by the love of family and of friends. The love in this sanctuary is a testament to a life lived righteously, a life that lifted other lives, a life that changed this country for the better over the course of nearly one century here on Earth.

Michelle and I didn't know Dr. Height as well, or as long, as many of you. We were reminded during a previous moment in the service, when you have a nephew who's 88—[laughter]—you've lived a full life.

But we did come to know her in the early days of my campaign. And we came to love her, as so many loved her. We came to love her stories. And we loved her smile. And we loved those hats—[laughter]—that she wore like a crown—regal. In the White House, she was a regular. She came by not once, not

twice; 21 times she stopped by the White House. [Laughter] Took part in our discussions around health care reform in her final months.

Last February, I was scheduled to see her and other civil rights leaders to discuss the pressing problems of unemployment—Reverend Sharpton, Ben Jealous of the NAACP, Marc Morial of the National Urban League. Then we discovered that Washington was about to be blanketed by the worst blizzard in record—2 feet of snow.

So I suggested to one of my aides, we should call Dr. Height and say we're happy to reschedule the meeting. Certainly if the others come, she should not feel obliged. True to form, Dr. Height insisted on coming, despite the blizzard, never mind that she was in a wheelchair. She was not about to let just a bunch of men—[laughter]—in this meeting. It was only when the car literally could not get to her driveway that she reluctantly decided to stay home. But she still sent a message—[laughter]—about what needed to be done.

And I tell that story partly because it brings a smile to my face, but also because it captures the quiet, dogged, dignified persistence that all of us who loved Dr. Height came to know