

But, in addition to being proud of her, I could not be prouder of you, the young people, because it's hard enough to follow a recipe and make something good to eat. I'm not a great cook. I'm an okay cook. I can make a good omelet and—[laughter]—toast. [Laughter]

*The First Lady.* Chili.

*The President.* I make a very good chili, it's true. But look, let's face it, I don't cook that often these days. But I remember cooking, and it's not always easy to make something that people like to eat. Then for you guys to actually come up with recipes that are healthy and tasty, and to do it in a way that helps to contribute to spreading the word about healthy eating among your peers, that's a really big deal.

So we're very proud of you. We're very impressed with everything that you've done. I hope you guys are having a good time while you're here. Everybody, by the way, looks very sharp—

*The First Lady.* Yes.

*The President.* —looks very good.

I only have one request for you, and that is try not to drop any scraps on the floor because Bo—[laughter]—Bo is on a diet right now and he will eat anything that he sees, especially some of the tasty meals that you guys have prepared.

So thank you very much, everybody. Good luck. All right?

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:12 p.m. in the East Room at the White House.

## Remarks and an Exchange With Reporters Following a Press Briefing by White House Press Secretary James F. "Jay" Carney August 20, 2012

*The President.* Hello, everybody.

*Press Secretary Carney.* Looks like there's a surprise guest here.

*The President.* Jay tells me that you guys have been missing me. [Laughter] So I thought I'd come by and just say hello.

Before I take some questions, let me just mention, since Medicare has been a little bit in the news lately, I thought it would be useful to start with some actual facts and news about the program.

Today HHS announced that thanks to the health care law that we passed, nearly 5.4 million seniors with Medicare have saved over \$4.1 billion on prescription drugs. That's an average savings of more than \$700 per person. This year alone, 18 million seniors with Medicare have taken advantage of new preventive care benefits like a mammogram or other cancer screening at no extra cost.

These are big deals for a lot of Americans, and it represents two important ways that the improvements we made as part of the Affordable Care Act have strengthened Medicare and helped seniors everywhere get better care at less cost. That's been our goal from the very

beginning, and I'm going to continue to do everything I can to make sure that we keep our seniors healthy and the American people healthy.

So with that, let me start off with Jim Kuhnhehn [Associated Press].

*Rape/Women's Health Issues/Missouri Republican Senatorial Candidate Todd W. Akin*

*Q.* Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for being here. You're no doubt aware of the comments that the Missouri Senate candidate, Republican Todd Akin, made on rape and abortion. I wondered if you think those views represent the views of the Republican Party in general. They've been denounced by your own rival and other Republicans. Are they an outlier or are they representative?

*The President.* Well, let me, first of all, say the views expressed were offensive. Rape is rape. And the idea that we should be parsing and qualifying and slicing what types of rape we're talking about doesn't make sense to the American people and certainly doesn't make sense to me.

So what I think these comments do underscore is why we shouldn't have a bunch of politicians, a majority of whom are men, making health care decisions on behalf of women.

And so, although these particular comments have led Governor Romney and other Republicans to distance themselves, I think the underlying notion that we should be making decisions on behalf of women for their health care decisions—or qualifying forcible rape versus nonforcible rape—I think those are broader issues, and that is a significant difference in approach between me and the other party.

But I don't think that they would agree with the Senator from Missouri in terms of his statement, which was way out there.

*Q.* Should he drop out of the race?

*The President.* He was nominated by the Republicans in Missouri. I'll let them sort that out.

Nancy Cordes [CBS News].

### 2012 Presidential Election

*Q.* Yes, Mr. President, thank you. As you know, your opponent recently accused you of waging a campaign filled with “anger and hate.” And you told “Entertainment Tonight” that anyone who attends your rallies can see that they're not angry or hate-filled affairs. But in recent weeks, your campaign has suggested repeatedly, without proof, that Mr. Romney might be hiding something in his tax returns. They have suggested that Mr. Romney might be a felon for the way that he handed over power of Bain Capital. And your campaign and the White House have declined to condemn an ad by one of your top supporters that links Mr. Romney to a woman's death from cancer. Are you comfortable with the tone that's being set by your campaign? Have you asked them to change their tone when it comes to defining Mr. Romney?

*The President.* Well, first of all, I'm not sure all those characterizations that you laid out there were accurate. For example, nobody accused Mr. Romney of being a felon.

And I think that what is absolutely true is, if you watch me on the campaign trail, here's what I'm talking about. I'm talking about how

we put Americans back to work. And there are sharp differences between myself and Mr. Romney in terms of how we would do that. He thinks that if we roll back Wall Street reform, roll back the Affordable Care Act—otherwise known affectionately as Obamacare—that somehow people are going to be better off.

I think that if we are putting teachers back to work and rebuilding America and reducing our deficit in a balanced way, that's how you put people back to work. That is a substantive difference. That's what I talk about on the campaign.

When it comes to taxes, Governor Romney thinks that we should be cutting taxes by another \$5 trillion, and folks like me would benefit disproportionately from that. I think that it makes a lot more sense and have put out a detailed plan for a balanced approach that combines tough spending cuts with asking people like me—millionaires and billionaires—to do a little bit more. That's a substantive difference in this campaign.

Whether it's on wind energy or how we would approach funding education, those are the topics that we're spending a lot of time talking about in the campaign.

Now, if you look at the overall trajectory of our campaign and the ads that I've approved and are produced by my campaign, you'll see that we point out sharp differences between the candidates, but we don't go out of bounds. And when it comes to releasing taxes, that's a precedent that was set decades ago, including by Governor Romney's father. And for us to say that it makes sense to release your tax returns, as I did, as John McCain did, as Bill Clinton did, as the two President Bushes did, I don't think is in any way out of bounds.

I think that is what the American people would rightly expect—is a sense that, particularly, when we're going to be having a huge debate about how we reform our Tax Code and how we pay for the Government that we need, I think people want to know that everybody has been playing by the same rules, including people who are seeking the highest office in the land. This is not an entitlement, being President of the United States. This is a privilege.

And we've got to put ourselves before the American people to make our case.

*Q.* Well, why not send a message to the top super PAC that's supporting you and say, I think an ad like that is out of bounds? We shouldn't be suggesting that—

*The President.* So let's take that particular issue, as opposed to—because you lumped in a whole bunch of other stuff that I think was entirely legitimate. I don't think that Governor Romney is somehow responsible for the death of the woman that was portrayed in that ad. But keep in mind, this is an ad that I didn't approve, I did not produce, and as far as I can tell, has barely run. I think it ran once.

Now, in contrast, you've got Governor Romney creating as a centerpiece of his campaign this notion that we're taking the work requirement out of welfare, which every single person here who's looked at it says is patently false. Right? What he's arguing is, somehow we have changed the welfare requirement—the work requirement in our welfare laws. And in fact, what's happened was that my administration—responding to the requests of five Governors, including two Republican Governors—agreed to approve giving them, those States, some flexibility in how they manage their welfare rolls as long as it produced 20-percent increases in the number of people who are getting work.

So, in other words, we would potentially give States more flexibility to put more people back to work, not to take them off the work requirement under welfare. Everybody who has looked at this says what Governor Romney is saying is absolutely wrong. Not only are his super PACs running millions of dollars' worth of ads making this claim, Governor Romney himself is approving this and saying it on the stump.

So the contrast, I think, is pretty stark. That's—they can run the campaign that they want, but the truth of the matter is, you can't just make stuff up. That's one thing you learn as President of the United States. You get called into account.

And I feel very comfortable with the fact that when you look at the campaign we're run-

ning, we are focused on the issues and the differences that matter to working families all across America. And that's exactly the kind of debate the American people deserve.

Jake Tapper [ABC News].

### *Afghanistan/National Economy*

*Q.* Mr. President, a couple questions. One, I'm wondering if you could comment on the recent spate of green-on-blue incidents in Afghanistan, what is being done about it, why your commanders tell you they think that there has been an uptick in this kind of violence. And second, with the economy and unemployment still the focus of so many Americans, what they can expect in the next couple months out of Washington, if anything, when it comes to any attempt to bring some more economic growth to the country.

*The President.* On Afghanistan, obviously, we've been watching with deep concern these so-called green-on-blue attacks, where you have Afghan individuals, some of whom are actually enrolled in the Afghan military, some in some cases dressing up as Afghan military or police, attacking coalition forces, including our own troops.

I just spoke today to Marty Dempsey, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who happens to be in Afghanistan. He is having intensive consultations not only with our commander, John Allen, on the ground, but also with Afghan counterparts. And I'll be reaching out to President Karzai as well, because we've got to make sure that we're on top of this.

We are already doing a range of things, and we're seeing some success when it comes to better counterintelligence, making sure that the vetting process for Afghan troops is stronger. And we've got what's called the Guardian Angel program to make sure that our troops aren't in isolated situations that might make them more vulnerable. But obviously, we're going to have to do more, because there has been an uptick over the last 12 months on this.

Part of what's taking place is we are transitioning to Afghan security, and for us to train them effectively, we are in much closer contact—our troops are in much closer contact—with Afghan

troops on an ongoing basis. And part of what we've got to do is to make sure that this model works, but it doesn't make our guys more vulnerable.

In the long term, we will see fewer U.S. casualties and coalition casualties by sticking to our transition plan and making sure that we've got the most effective Afghan security force possible. But we've got to do it in a way that doesn't leave our guys vulnerable.

So we are deeply concerned about this from top to bottom. And hopefully, over the next several weeks, we'll start seeing better progress on this front.

In terms of the economy, I would love to say that when Congress comes back—they've got a week or 10 days before they go out and start campaigning again—that we're going to see a flurry of action. I can't guarantee that. I do think that there's some specific things they could do that would make a big difference. I'll give you a couple of examples.

First of all, just making sure that we've got a—what's called a continuing resolution so that we don't have any disruptions and Government shutdowns over the next couple months, that's important. It appears that there's an agreement on that, but we want to make sure that that gets done.

Number two, we have put forward an idea that I think a lot of Americans think makes sense, which is, we've got historically low interest rates now, and the housing market is beginning to tick back up but it's still not at all where it needs to be. There are a lot of families out there whose homes are underwater; they owe more than the house is worth because housing values dropped so precipitously. And they're having trouble refinancing.

We're going to be pushing Congress to see if they can pass a refinancing bill that puts \$3,000 into the pockets of the average family who hasn't yet refinanced their mortgage. That's a big deal. That \$3,000 can be used to strengthen the equity in that person's home, which would raise home values. Alternatively, that's \$3,000 in people's pockets that they can spend

on a new computer for their kid going back to school or new school clothes for their kids. And so that would strengthen the economy as well.

Obviously, the biggest thing that Congress could do would be to come up with a sensible approach to reducing our deficit in ways that we had agreed to and talked about last year. And I continue to be open to seeing Congress approach this with a balanced plan that has tough spending cuts, building on the trillion dollars' worth of spending cuts that we've already made, but also asks for additional revenue from folks like me, from folks in the top 1 or 2 percent, to make sure that folks who can least afford it aren't suddenly bearing the burden and we're providing some additional certainty to small businesses and families going forward.

Alternatively, they could go ahead and vote for a bill that we've said would definitely strengthen the economy, and that is giving everybody who's making \$250,000 a year or less certainty that their taxes aren't going to go down [go up] next year. That would make a big difference.

Now, obviously, the Republicans have voted that down already once. It's not likely, realistically, that they're going to bring it back up again before election day. But my hope is, after the election, people will step back and recognize that that's a sensible way to bring down our deficit and allow us to still invest in things like education that are going to help the economy grow.

So Chuck Todd [NBC News].

#### *2012 Presidential Election/Syria*

Q. Mr. President, could you update us on your latest thinking of where you think things are in Syria and, in particular, whether you envision using U.S. military, if simply for nothing else, the safe keeping of the chemical weapons, and if you're confident that the chemical weapons are safe?

I also want to follow up on an answer you just gave to Nancy. You said that one of the

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\* White House correction.

reasons you wanted to see Mitt Romney's tax returns was you want to see if everybody is playing by the same set of rules. It actually goes to the question she asked, which is this implication, do you think there's something Mitt Romney is not telling us in his tax returns that indicates he's not playing by the same set of rules?

*The President.* No. There's a difference between playing by the same sets of rules and doing something illegal. And in no way have we suggested the latter. But the first disclosure—the 1 year's of tax returns that he disclosed—indicated that he used Swiss bank accounts, for example. Well, that may be perfectly legal, but I suspect if you ask the average American, do you have one and is that part of how you manage your tax obligations, they would say no. They would find that relevant information, particularly when we're going into a time where we know we're going to have to make tough choices both about spending and about taxes.

So I think the idea that this is somehow exceptional, that there should be a rationale or a justification for doing more than the very bare minimum has it backwards. I mean, the assumption should be you do what previous Presidential candidates did, dating back to—for decades. And Governor Romney's own dad says, well, the reason I put out 10 or 12 years is because any single year might not tell you the whole story. And everybody has, I think, followed that custom ever since.

The American people have assumed that if you want to be President of the United States, that your life's an open book when it comes to things like your finances. I'm not asking him to disclose every detail of his medical records, although we normally do that as well. [*Laughter*] You know? I mean, this isn't sort of overly personal here, guys. This is pretty standard stuff. I don't think we're being mean by asking him to do what every other Presidential candidate has done. Right? It's what the American people expect.

On Syria, obviously, this is a very tough issue. I have indicated repeatedly that President al-Asad has lost legitimacy, that he needs to

step down. So far, he hasn't gotten the message, and instead has double downed in violence on his own people. The international community has sent a clear message that rather than drag his country into civil war he should move in the direction of a political transition. But at this point, the likelihood of a soft landing seems pretty distant.

What we've said is, number one, we want to make sure we're providing humanitarian assistance, and we've done that to the tune of \$82 million, I believe, so far. And we'll probably end up doing a little more because we want to make sure that the hundreds of thousands of refugees that are fleeing the mayhem, that they don't end up creating—or being in a terrible situation or also destabilizing some of Syria's neighbors.

The second thing we've done is we said that we would provide, in consultation with the international community, some assistance to the opposition in thinking about how would a political transition take place and what are the principles that should be upheld in terms of looking out for minority rights and human rights. And that consultation is taking place.

I have, at this point, not ordered military engagement in the situation. But the point that you made about chemical and biological weapons is critical. That's an issue that doesn't just concern Syria, it concerns our close allies in the region, including Israel. It concerns us. We cannot have a situation where chemical or biological weapons are falling into the hands of the wrong people.

We have been very clear to the Asad regime, but also to other players on the ground, that a red line for us is we start seeing a whole bunch of chemical weapons moving around or being utilized. That would change my calculus. That would change my equation.

*Q.* So you're confident it's somehow under—it's safe?

*The President.* In a situation this volatile, I wouldn't say that I am absolutely confident. What I'm saying is we're monitoring that situation very carefully. We have put together a range of contingency plans. We have communicated in no uncertain terms with every player

in the region that that's a red line for us and that there would be enormous consequences if we start seeing movement on the chemical weapons front or the use of chemical weapons. That would change my calculations significantly.

All right, thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:27 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred

to Republican Presidential candidate former Gov. W. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts; 2008 Republican Presidential nominee Sen. John S. McCain III; Gov. Edmund G. "Jerry" Brown, Jr., of California; Gov. Dannel P. Malloy of Connecticut; Gov. Mark B. Dayton of Minnesota; Gov. Brian E. Sandoval of Nevada; Gov. Gary R. Herbert of Utah; and Gen. John R. Allen, USMC, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan.

## Remarks at a Campaign Rally in Columbus, Ohio

August 21, 2012

*The President.* Hello, Ohio! Hello, Crusaders! Oh, it is good to be back in Columbus! The sun came out for us. It's a good sign.

It is fun to be back in Ohio, and it is great to be here. I just want to acknowledge a few people. First of all, give Steven a big round of applause. He was explaining to me what it's like being a BMX driver—rider. And he said that—he said, well—I asked him, because I'd seen those guys in the Olympics, and I said, "It seems like you guys fall a lot." [Laughter] And he says, "No, no, I learned how to fall on my shoulder." I said, "Well, is that good?" He said, "Well, I broke my shoulder four times." [Laughter] So—but he looks okay to me. He's doing great.

A couple other people I want to acknowledge: Your outstanding mayor Michael Coleman is in the house. There he is. And we've got congressional candidate—Joyce Beatty is here. And all of you are here.

How many students do we have here? You guys are excited about school starting up? Everybody was saying yes except this one guy over here. [Laughter] I—he was shaking his head. Come on, man, it's going to be great.

Well, I am glad we've got some students here because I came to Columbus today to talk about what most of the students here are doing every day. Your education is the single most important investment that you can make in your future. And I'm proud of all the students who are here doing what it takes to make that investment, the long hours in the library—ex-

cept for this guy. [Laughter] Working in the lab, being in the classroom—even when your classes start a little earlier than you had planned—because your education's never been more important.

The degree that you earn from this university is the surest path that you will have to a good job and to higher earnings. It's the best tool you'll have to achieve what is the core promise of this country: the idea that if you work hard, your work will be rewarded. The basic bargain that says if you're willing to put in the effort, you can do well enough to raise a family and have a home that you call your own, have some security, put a little away for retirement, and most importantly, make sure that your children, your grandchildren can do even better and dream even bigger than you did. That's the hope that your parents had for you. That's the hope I have for Malia and Sasha. That's the hope that you'll someday have for your own kids.

But here's the thing. This is about more than just your own success. Now more than ever, your success is America's success, because when we invest in your future, we're investing in America's future. The fact is that countries that outeducate us today, they'll be able to outcompete us tomorrow. Businesses are mobile in the 21st-century economy; they can locate anywhere. So they're going to create jobs and they're going to hire wherever they find the best educated, most highly skilled workers. And I don't want them to have to look any further than