

working with Frank on critical issues before us these next 2 years, and Michelle and I wish him and Bonnie all the best.

NOTE: The statement referred to Bonnie Englehardt Lautenberg, wife of Sen. Lautenberg.

## Remarks Prior to a Meeting With President Giorgio Napolitano of Italy February 15, 2013

*President Obama.* Well, I want to extend the warmest greetings to my good friend, President Napolitano, on a return visit to the White House. I think it's entirely appropriate the day after Valentine's Day, since we know that St. Valentine was associated with Italy, that we had a chance to express our love for the Italian people and my high regard for President Napolitano.

He has been an extraordinary leader not just in Italy, but also in Europe. We've had occasion to meet many times in which we have expressed again and again the importance of the transatlantic relationship and the deep and abiding friendship and connection and bond between the Italian people and the American people.

And obviously, we constantly talk about the extraordinary connection that derives from the tradition of Italian Americans making enormous contributions to the United States. President Napolitano has been so gracious in talking about his memories of the role that America played in liberating Europe and instituting the kinds of democratic practices and traditions that have served both sides of the Atlantic so well for so many years.

I want to thank the people of Italy for their enormous contributions to the NATO alliance. Italy is one of our biggest contributors in Afghanistan and makes enormous sacrifices. They welcome and host our troops on Italian soil. The economic bonds between our two countries are very significant. And in all this, President Napolitano has shown himself to be a visionary leader who has helped to guide and steer Europe towards greater unification, but always with a strong transatlantic relationship in mind.

The last point I would make is that President Napolitano has also just been a good personal friend, a tremendous host to my family

when they visited Italy. You should know, Mr. President, that one of the few things that my daughters asked me after I was reelected was, does this mean we can go back to Italy again? So I confirmed to them that any excuse we can find to visit Italy, we shall return, hopefully.

And this will give us an opportunity to not only visit, but also to talk about some important issues, including the world economy. I announced at the State of the Union this week my interest and intention in pursuing a U.S.-European Union free trade agreement, which I know is something of great interest to the President. I'll be interested in hearing from him how he anticipates the elections and government formation in Italy and what implications that has for the larger European project. And I'm sure we'll have a chance to talk about some national security issues as well.

But my main message is to say, thank you for your extraordinary service, and I'm so glad that we had an opportunity to visit once again before you move on to even better things—I assume they're at least having more fun than politics.

*President Napolitano.* Thank you very much. I don't need to say how deeply touched I am by the generous appreciation we just heard of my long public service in the interest of Italy, of our alliance, of our common cause. And I am grateful to President Obama for inviting me to pay a farewell visit at the White House and for giving me the opportunity of an exchange of ideas before I conclude my Presidential mandate.

I am sure that we will be able today to express a common sense of confidence in the future of Italy and of U.S.-Italy relations, more generally speaking, in the future of our joint commitment to advance global peace, democracy, and human rights.

Italy has made a remarkable progress in the past 14 months: the Italian Government with parliamentary support of different and even opposite political forces, and with the comprehension of different social groups and of all citizens. While this progress must and will continue and be developed because Italy needs it, Europe needs it, and I think the world as a whole needs it.

The announcement which has been made, just made in Brussels and in Washington—significantly because I was impressed by the words, “We, the leaders of the European Union and of the United States.” It was a beautiful *incipit*. Yes, well, I think that the trade—the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, which will be realized—now we are the opening talks, but I am sure about also the conclusion—can represent a relevant contribution for promoting a new wave of development, of technologic advancement, of social justice on both shores of the Atlantic. And I think it can represent even something more. It is to say a new historic stage in relations between Europe and the United States, not only

economically, but also from a political and moral point of view.

My conviction is that the effect that a shift has been taking place in the center of gravity of the world development of international relations doesn’t cancel at all the crucial importance of transatlantic alliance, of transatlantic relations. On the contrary, it represents a new stimulus for us to make such a framework of relation more active, more competitive. It is absolutely necessary for a better world to have our common heritage of values and experiences be a decisive factor also in the course of globalization in the next future.

It is the spirit in which I am here to testify once more my personal friendship and my admiration for President Obama, only deploring that the visit of President and his family in Rome was so short, and expecting a new visit also in my new capacity. I be in another palace, but I be there to welcome you.

*President Obama.* That’s great. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:10 a.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## Remarks on Presenting the Presidential Citizens Medal February 15, 2013

*The President.* Thank you very much, everybody. Please, please have a seat. Well, it is a pleasure to welcome some of our Nation’s finest citizens here to the people’s house. And let me be the first to congratulate each of you and your family members for the receipt of the highest honor a civilian can receive: the Citizens Medal.

We host a lot of events at the White House, but I have to admit this is one of my favorites, because it’s a moment when, as a people, we get to recognize some extraordinary men and women who have gone above and beyond for their country and for their fellow citizens, often without fanfare, often with not a lot of attention, very rarely for any profit. You do it because it’s the right thing to do, because you want to give back. And today we honor you, we celebrate you, and most of all, we have a

chance to say thank you. Because all of us—are what the rest of us aspire to be.

In America, we have the benefit of living in this big and diverse nation. We’re home to 315 million people who come from every background, who worship every faith, who hold every single point of view. But what binds us together, what unites us, is a single sacred word: citizen.

It’s a word that, as I said in my State of the Union Address, doesn’t just describe our nationality or our legal status, the fact that we hold a passport. It defines our way of life. It captures our belief in something bigger than ourselves; our willingness to accept certain obligations to one another and to embrace the idea that we’re all in this together, that out of many, we are one. It’s the thing that de Tocqueville noticed about America when he first came to visit: These folks participate, they get