

Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Julia A. Pierson as Director of the United States Secret Service and an Exchange With Reporters March 27, 2013

The President. Okay, Joe. You got the floor.

[At this point, Vice President Joe Biden administered the oath of office to Director Pierson.]

Vice President Biden. Congratulations.

The President. Great job.

Director Pierson. Thank you very much, Mr. President.

The President. Thank you so much. Well, listen, I have to say that Julia's reputation within the Service is extraordinary. She's come up through the ranks. She's done just about every job there is to do at the Secret Service.

Obviously, she's breaking the mold in terms of Directors of the agencies, and I think that people are all extraordinarily proud of her. And we have the greatest confidence in the wonderful task that lies ahead and very confident that she is going to do a great job. So we just want to say congratulations.

As Joe Biden pointed out, this person now probably has more control over our lives than anyone else—[laughter]—except for our spouses. And I couldn't be placing our lives in better hands than Julia's.

Remarks on Gun Violence March 28, 2013

Thank you, everybody. Thank you, Katerina, for sharing your story. Reema was lucky to have you as a teacher, and all of us are fortunate to have you here today. And I'm glad we had a chance to remember her.

Katerina, as you just heard, lost one of her most promising students in Virginia Tech, the shootings there that took place 6 years ago. And she and dozens of other moms and dads, all victims of gun violence, have come here today from across the country, united not only in grief and loss, but also in resolve and in courage and in a deep determination to do whatever

Vice President Biden. And my agents are excited that we picked her.

The President. Absolutely. You're going to do a great job.

Director Pierson's Qualifications

Q. How did you make your decision?

The President. She has extraordinary qualifications, and I think a lot of people who have worked with Julia know how dedicated, how professional, how committed she is, and, I think, are absolutely certain that she's going to thrive in this job. All right?

Thank you, guys.

NCAA Basketball Tournament

Q. How are you feeling about your bracket, sir?

The President. Busted. [Laughter] I think my women's bracket is doing much better than my men's bracket.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:16 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Biden.

er they can, as parents and as citizens, to protect other kids and spare other families from the awful pain that they have endured.

As any of the families and friends who are here today can tell you, the grief doesn't ever go away. That loss, that pain sticks with you. It lingers on in places like Blacksburg and Tucson and Aurora. That anguish is still fresh in Newtown. It's been barely 100 days since 20 innocent children and 6 brave educators were taken from us by gun violence, including Grace McDonnell and Lauren Rousseau and Jesse Lewis, whose families are here today.

That agony burns deep in the families of thousands—thousands—of Americans who have been stolen from our lives by a bullet from a gun over these last 100 days, including Hadiya Pendleton, who was killed on her way to school less than 2 months ago and whose mom is also here today. Everything they lived for and hoped for, taken away in an instant. We have moms on this stage whose children were killed as recently as 35 days ago.

I don't think any of us who are parents can hear their stories and not think about our own daughters and our own sons and our own grandchildren. We all feel that it is our first impulse as parents to do everything we can to protect our children from harm, to make any sacrifice to keep them safe, to do what we have to do to give them a future where they can grow up and learn and explore and become the amazing people they're destined to be.

That's why, in January, Joe Biden, leading a Task Force, came up with, and I put forward, a series of commonsense proposals to reduce the epidemic of gun violence and keep our kids safe. In my State of the Union Address, I called on Congress to give these proposals a vote. And in just a couple of weeks, they will.

Earlier this month, the Senate advanced some of the most important reforms designed to reduce gun violence. All of them are consistent with the Second Amendment. None of them will infringe on the rights of responsible gun owners. What they will do is keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people who put others at risk. And this is our best chance in more than a decade to take commonsense steps that will save lives.

As I said when I visited Newtown just over 3 months ago, if there is a step we can take that will save just one child, just one parent, just another town from experiencing the same grief that some of the moms and dads who are here have endured, then we should be doing it. We have an obligation to try.

Now, in the coming weeks, Members of Congress will vote on whether we should require universal background checks for anyone who wants to buy a gun so that criminals or people with severe mental illnesses can't get

their hands on one. They'll vote on tough new penalties for anyone who buys guns only to turn around and sell them to criminals. They'll vote on a measure that would keep weapons of war and high-capacity ammunition magazines that facilitate these mass killings off our streets. They'll get to vote on legislation that would help schools become safer and help people struggling with mental health problems to get the treatment that they need.

None of these ideas should be controversial. Why wouldn't we want to make it more difficult for a dangerous person to get his or her hand on a gun? Why wouldn't we want to close the loophole that allows as many as 40 percent of all gun purchases to take place without a background check? Why wouldn't we do that?

And if you ask most Americans outside of Washington—including many gun owners—some of these ideas, they don't consider them controversial. Right now 90 percent of Americans—90 percent—support background checks that will keep criminals and people who have been found to be a danger to themselves or others from buying a gun. More than 80 percent of Republicans agree. More than 80 percent of gun owners agree. Think about that. How often do 90 percent of Americans agree on anything? [*Laughter*] It never happens.

Many other reforms are supported by clear majorities of Americans. And I ask every American to find out where your Member of Congress stands on these ideas. If they're not part of that 90 percent who agree that we should make it harder for a criminal or somebody with a severe mental illness to buy a gun, then you should ask them, why not? Why are you part of the 10 percent?

There's absolutely no reason why we can't get this done. But the reason we're talking about it here today is because it's not done until it's done. And there are some powerful voices on the other side that are interested in running out the clock or changing the subject or drowning out the majority of the American people to prevent any of these reforms from happening at all. They're doing everything they can to make all our progress collapse under the

weight of fear and frustration. Or their assumption is that people will just forget about it.

I read an article in the news just the other day wondering if Washington—has Washington missed its opportunity, because as time goes on after Newtown, somehow, people start moving on and forgetting. Let me tell you, the people here, they don't forget. Grace's dad is not forgetting. Hadiya's mom hasn't forgotten. The notion that 2 months or 3 months after something as horrific as what happened in Newtown happens and we've moved on to other things, that's not who we are. That's not who we are.

Now, I want to make sure every American is listening today. Less than 100 days ago that happened, and the entire country was shocked. And the entire country pledged we would do something about it and that this time would be different. Shame on us if we've forgotten. I haven't forgotten those kids. Shame on us if we've forgotten.

If there's one thing I've said consistently since I first ran for this office: Nothing is more powerful than millions of voices calling for change. And that's why it's so important that all these moms and dads are here today. But that's also why it's important that we've got grassroots groups out there that got started and are out there mobilizing and organizing and keeping up the fight. That's what it's going to take to make this country safer. It's going to take moms and dads, and hunters and sportsmen and clergy and local officials, like the mayors who are here today, standing up and saying, this time really is different: that we're not just going to sit back and wait until the next Newtown or the next Blacksburg or the next innocent, beautiful child is gunned down in a playground in Chicago or Philadelphia or Los Angeles before we summon the will to act.

Right now Members of Congress are back home in their districts, and many of them are holding events where they can hear from their constituents. So I want everybody who is listening to make yourself heard right now.

If you think that checking someone's criminal record before he can check out a gun show is common sense, you've got to make yourself

heard. If you're a responsible, law-abiding gun owner who wants to keep irresponsible, law-breaking individuals from abusing the right to bear arms by inflicting harm on a massive scale, speak up. We need your voices in this debate. If you're a mom like Katerina who wants to make this country safer, a stronger place for our children to learn and grow up, get together with other moms, like the ones here today, and raise your voices and make yourselves unmistakably heard.

We need everybody to remember how we felt 100 days ago and make sure that what we said at that time wasn't just a bunch of platitudes, that we meant it.

The desire to make a difference is what brought Corey Thornblad here today. Corey grew up in Oklahoma, where her dad sold firearms at gun shows. And today, she's a mom and a teacher. And Corey said that after Newtown, she cried for days: for the students who could have been her students; for the parents she could have known; for the teachers like her who go to work every single day and love their kids and want them to succeed. And Corey says: "My heart was broken. And I decided now was the time to act, to march, the time to petition, the time to make phone calls, because tears were no longer enough." And that's my attitude.

Tears aren't enough. Expressions of sympathy aren't enough. Speeches aren't enough. We've cried enough. We've known enough heartbreak. What we're proposing is not radical, it's not taking away anybody's gun rights. It's something that, if we are serious, we will do.

Now is the time to turn that heartbreak into something real. It won't solve every problem. There will still be gun deaths. There will still be tragedies. There will still be violence. There will still be evil. But we can make a difference if not just the activists here on this stage, but the general public—including responsible gun owners—say, you know what, we can do better than this. We can do better to make sure that fewer parents have to endure the pain of losing a child to an act of violence.

That's what this is about. And enough people like Katerina and Corey and the rest of the parents who are here today get involved, and if enough Members of Congress take a stand for cooperation and common sense and lead and don't get squishy because time has passed and maybe it's not on the news every single day, if that's who we are, if that's our character, that we're willing to follow through on commitments that we say are important—commitments to each other and to our kids—then I'm confident we can make this country a safer place for all of them.

So thank you very much, everybody. God bless you. God bless America.

Remarks Following a Meeting With African Leaders and an Exchange With Reporters

March 28, 2013

The President. Well, it is a great pleasure to welcome four leaders from Africa, all of whom are doing extraordinary work: President Sall from Senegal, President Banda from Malawi, President Koroma from Sierra Leone, and Prime Minister Neves from Cape Verde.

The reason that I'm meeting with these four is, they exemplify the progress that we're seeing in Africa. All of them have had to deal with some extraordinary challenges. Sierra Leone, just 10 years ago, was in the midst of as brutal a civil war as we've ever seen. And yet now we've seen consecutive fair and free elections. And under President Koroma's leadership, we've seen not only good governance, but also significant economic growth.

When you talk about Malawi, there was a constitutional crisis just last year. And yet President Banda has not only been able to be in office and make sure that constitutional order was restored, but has also made significant progress on behalf of her people. And her personal story of overcoming a history of abuse and leading women throughout her country, I think, indicates the kinds of progress that can be made when you've got strong leadership.

The same is true for His Excellency President Sall. There were some bumps in the road

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:58 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Katerina Rodgaard, member, Mothers Demand Action for Gun Sense in America; Cleopatra Crowley-Pendleton, mother of Hadiya Z. Pendleton, who was killed in Chicago, IL, on January 29; Chris McDonnell, father of Grace McDonnell, who was killed in the shootings at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, CT, on December 14, 2012; and Corey T. Thornblad, social studies teacher, Joyce Kilmer Middle School in Vienna, VA.

in terms of transition from the previous President, and yet the Senegalese rose up at a grassroots level and sustained their democracy.

And Cape Verde is a real success story. We were hearing from Prime Minister Neves about the fact that just in a few decades, they've moved from a per capita income of maybe \$200 a year to now \$4,000 a year and are now moving into the middle of the pack in terms of development levels because of good governance and management.

So what our discussion has focused on is, number one, how do we continue to build on strong democracies, how do we continue to build on transparency and accountability. Because what we've learned over the last several decades is that when you've got good governance—when you have democracies that work, sound management of public funds, transparency and accountability to the citizens that put leaders in place—it turns out that that is not only good for the state and the functioning of government, it's also good for economic development, because it gives people confidence, it attracts business, it facilitates trade and commerce.

And all of these leaders have good stories to tell on that. They recognize that there's still