

tion, so eager to make your mark. She said, "Give us jobs as creators." Give us jobs as creators.

Sometimes, young people are known as just consumers of goods, but we want young people creating the new products, the next big thing that will change how we live our lives. So that's the agenda that I want to pursue.

And I understand that there are those—both here in Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, but also back home in the United States—who are skeptical of progress, who maybe doubt the capacity for us to make the most of this moment. There are always cynics who say, "Aw, this is too hard," the headwinds you face are too stiff. They say: "Mexico has been here before. We look like we're making progress, we're looking at a bright horizon, on the verge of great possibility, but then we get blown off course."

And it's true that nothing is inevitable. Progress and success is never guaranteed. The future that you dream of, the Mexico you imagine, it must be built; it must be earned. Nobody else can do it for you. Only you can earn it. You are the future. As Nervo wrote in "La Raza de Bronce," *tu eres el sueño*—you are the dream.

For just as it was patriots who answered the call when Father Hidalgo rang the church bell two centuries ago, you—your lives in a free Mexico—are the dream that they imagined. And now it falls to you to keep alive those vir-

tues for which so many generations of Mexicans struggled.

You are the dream that can stand up for justice and human rights and human dignity, here at home and around the world. You're the creators and the builders and the climbers and the strivers who can deliver progress and prosperity that will lift up not just the Mexican people for generations to come, but the entire world.

You're the men and women who will push this nation upwards as Mexico assumes its rightful place, as you proudly sing, "in heaven your eternal destiny was written by the finger of God."

You are the dream. This is your moment. And as you reach for the future, always remember that you have the greatest of partners, the greatest of friends, the nation that is rooting for your success more than anybody else, your neighbor, the United States of America.

Viva México! Viva los Estados Unidos! Que Dios los bendiga! Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:29 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to former President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa of Mexico; Alejandro Landín Cruz and Emelyn Medina, students, National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico City, Mexico; and Rafael Navarro-González, professor of astrobiology, National Autonomous University of Mexico in Mexico City, Mexico.

The President's News Conference With President Laura Chinchilla Miranda of Costa Rica in San Jose, Costa Rica May 3, 2013

President Chinchilla. Good afternoon. Good afternoon, dear friends. Dear friends, journalists—international journalists, and from American and SICA. Thank you very much. Thank you for being here with us this afternoon.

In the first place and before we get any deeper concerning the results of the meetings that we just had recently, in the first place, what I'd like to do is to reiterate our warmest welcome, on behalf of all the Costa Rican peo-

ple, to President Barack Obama and his delegation. And also I would like to reiterate on behalf of all Costa Ricans the feelings that we feel towards the United States of America.

And I also wanted to thank you very much for the way so cordial and constructive in which we have been able to develop this afternoon's issues, Mr. President, because I think that we have had very successful conversations in the bilateral meeting. It was my pleasure to

report that precisely thanks to this open process of conversations that we have had, it is that we can explore new horizons, always trying to strengthen these all traditions based on the defense of values—the essential values—that have characterized the relationship between the United States and Costa Rica.

Particularly speaking, I'm talking about values of peace, freedom, democracy, respect to the human rights, and the human development. These are the values that we share. And these are the values on which we aspire to continue to develop the relationship between our two nations.

The conversations that we have had have been very useful, and I—and they have basically focused on six fundamental issues that reflect this rich diversity that characterizes the relationship between the two nations. We talked about institutional strengthening. We talked about the issues of international policy and the involvement, in particular, to which Costa Rica aspires in the international economic scenario.

We also talked about the use of fundamental instruments in the relationship of the two nations, like CAFTA, for instance. We talked about an issue that is important but it is not the one that defines our relationship, which is security. And we also talked about a fundamental issue that undoubtedly is going to define the progress and the joint development, not only between the United States of America and Costa Rica, but also between the United States and the Central American region, which is the area of energy.

And finally, of course, in our Costa Rican agenda, we included issues having to do with education, entrepreneurship, and innovation.

And please allow me to briefly walk you through these six issues so that you can get to know which has been the central element in each of them.

In the area of institutional strengthening, as you know, the Government of the United States is promoting what is called the alliance of open governments, that basically seeks to strengthen practices that are much more transparent and integral in everything that has to do

with the exercise of institutions of public function.

Costa Rica has been an enthusiastic participant in this initiative. We have already proposed our action plan, and we aspire to continue to share initiatives, practices, exchanges of experiences in this issue.

In the area of involvement of Costa Rica in the economic global scenario and some of the issues of international policy, we have taken into account—we have used this session to talk about the involvement of the United States in the area of the fire weapons, and that together, they have been able to get the approval in the recent meeting of the United Nations.

Thank you very much, Mr. President, for having sponsored one of the treaties that is going to contribute the most to the peace in the world. In addition, I would like to recognize, in particular, the efforts of President Obama in the area—in his own country in order to raise awareness concerning the regulation of fire weapons.

Costa Rica, as some of you already know, is trying to play a more protagonistic role, especially in the area of global development. Costa Rica is a small economy, but it's a very open economy. It's a model of success. The inception of global value chains with more and more competitive, attracting—in the attraction based on high technology. And being a middle-income country, we are a country that is not seeking to get more aid. We basically want to have more opportunities to export what our people are producing.

As we have said in the past, we either export our products the people are able to produce or generate, or we're going to end up exporting our own people. And Costa Rica will continue to keep Costa Ricans in Costa Rica, with better opportunities of economic growth and with better opportunities of welfare.

And that is that the aspirations of Costa Rica include to be able to insert itself in the different fora where we will continue to widen the opportunities of trade, investment, and as a consequence, the opportunities to continue to generate employment and welfare in our country.

To this extent, we have talked to President Obama about two important fora where Costa Rica aspires to be present. One is the alliance—the Trans-Pacific alliance, the TPP, where the Government of the United States, and especially the Obama administration, is playing an important leadership to the effect of closing these negotiations. And we would hope that Costa Rica will continue to be the center of attention of the pioneer countries to be able to insert ourselves in the same initiative.

And the other important forum where we have given our best efforts is the forum for the cooperation and development. Costa Rica wants to be there precisely because we want to continue to adopt the best possible practices in matters of development of public policy.

In the area of the using of the CAFTA platform, as you know, this is going to be an issue—a regional issue, an issue of regional scope—but this becomes a bilateral issue to the extent that Costa Rica and the SICA—Costa Rica is one of the economies that has taken the best advantage of the opportunity provided by the economic—by the American market. We have become in the SICA framework the most important partner with the United States. Thanks to CAFTA, the countries in our region have increased by 70 percent the international trade. And what we basically seek is to be able to promote initiatives in the area of facilitation of trade.

Concerning the area of security, this, as I mentioned before, is an obligated issue. As you know, Costa Rica considered this a fundamental issue—has been considering this issue a fundamental one in the recent years. We have been able to do well facing common crime. We have been able to reduce the homicide rates significantly. We have been able to reduce the rates of violent crime, thanks to an integral approach in the area of prevention and sanction, as well as the issues having to do with control. But we also have to admit that the issue of organized crime continues to be important on the institution of stability and the integrity of our nations.

Thus, we talked about this issue. We had a conversation about it. We reiterated the im-

portance of keeping the levels of cooperation that's—that we have had so far. But very particularly, we made the point on the efforts that are being displayed by the SICA countries as well as the United States Government with the purpose of approaching the issue of organized crime and drug smuggling from a much more integral approach, a much more diverse approach, and not only through the instruments of war. Thinking that we're going to be able to overcome this evil, a country like Costa Rica cannot go, of course, to war, but we have to take very seriously the strengthening of those mechanisms and those policies that would allow to prevent the entry of organized crime in our country.

And in that sense, we are celebrating the efforts that we might be able to continue on doing in the matter of prevention of the consumption, with the matter of more opportunities for the younger communities of our country on the subject of strengthening the state of law, of the judicial independence, of the free press that might be able to carry out the necessary investigations, and the accusations without having on them any effect or threat.

The fifth point of the agenda was a subject regarding the energy. As it is well known also for Costa Rica, the energy subject has been a value from the point of view of its sustainable development. Ninety percent of the energy that we consume comes from renewable sources. Nevertheless, Costa Rica, as well as the rest of Central America, have a very big challenge ahead of them from the point of view of the cost of this energy. If we do not solve this in the short, midterm, this will have a tremendous weight on the level of competitiveness of our region.

Therefore, we have explored with President Obama the possibilities of using the platform of the CAFTA—of the CAFTA platform so that in the future—and once the Government of the United States resolves some of the internal discussions that it might have—to be able to enjoy some preferences in regard to the import of the natural gas, natural liquefied gas, a source of energy to which the Government of

President Obama have put a lot of emphasis on.

We have also commented about the efforts that we are developing here in Costa Rica with the purpose of promoting a group of new energies, especially the energies based on hydrogen, and the initiatives that have already been working on by the private enterprises—both North Americans and Costa Ricans—with the cooperation of the public sector of Costa Rica, to take them into consideration as part of the initiatives that he has promoted in the framework of the alliance of the Americas for the energy and for the climate change.

And I finish by talking about the subject of an interpartnership of innovation and of the education as essential elements of any agenda for the development. For Costa Rica, the education has been a constant in its historical development. And as I was telling President Obama, we were born as one of the poorest provinces of the colony, and we have become, little by little, in—the nation with great opportunities in the subject of economic development and of well-being for the people, and a fundamental factor, an essential factor has been precisely the education.

Much more—much before many other nations of the world, Costa Rica decreed the free and mandatory access to education. And now we dedicate 7 percent of our GDP to finance the public education, and we need, above all, to face the challenge of the reallocation of this education to the demands of the new economy to which we are aspiring to move our country.

In that sense, we have called upon the attention in regard to the possibility of using—with a greater intensity—the very beautiful program that has been characterized by the international policy of the United States, which is the Peace Corps, so that, through them, we might be able to improve even more. They have programs of bilingualism that Costa Rica, for 15 or 20 years, we have already been introducing in our public education.

We believe that through Peace Corps we can achieve training programs with our teachers, with our professors, our English professors, so that that English is a more proficient

English, more competitive, with greater quality, and bound precisely to the aspirations of attracting investments and generation of employments—intelligent employments that we are working on.

Finally, also, we have called President Obama's attention to the fact that there is nothing more valuable, that there is nothing more important than anybody to get to know a society from the inside. I am a true example precisely of the benefits of the scholarship programs that the United States in the past have offered the Central American region. As a matter of fact, that is why we have made a summit so that we can continue on promoting those scholarship programs and intensify them so that the youth of the Central American region—and of course, of my country—can continue on also knowing or feeding of not only for knowledge of the best universities, of the quality of education of the United States, but also of the livelihood, the values that have characterized this great nation.

So thank you very much. Mr. President Obama.

President Obama. Buenas tardes. Thank you so much, President Chinchilla, for your kind words and for welcoming me here today. This is my first visit to Costa Rica. And even though it is a brief one, I can already tell the incredible spirit of the people, the natural beauty of the country. I understand that the official slogan for those who are thinking about visiting Costa Rica is "*un país sin ingredientes artificiales.*" So there's nothing artificial about Costa Rica. Everything is genuine. And that's certainly true about the friendship between our two countries.

And President Chinchilla has been so gracious in her hospitality. We are very grateful to her. I want to thank publicly the wonderful schoolchildren who sang for us. And I noticed that, Madam President, you and I didn't sing. We didn't trust our voices. But we certainly enjoyed the spirit that those children delivered.

In the United States, we are so grateful for the contributions that Costa Ricans make to our country every day. You welcome many Americans as tourists, ecotourists, and many

others who have chosen to make Costa Rica a new home. This year we're also marking the 50th anniversary of the Peace Corps here, including President John F. Kennedy's visit to Costa Rica and his vision for partnerships that advance development and democracy in the Americas.

I had actually a chance during the bilateral meeting to see a photograph of President Kennedy at the same table that we were meeting at; it had been specially commissioned. And so it shows the longstanding ties between our two countries.

And I'm here because Costa Rica is a great partner not just regionally, but globally. Given Costa Rica's proud democratic traditions, we stand up together for democracy and justice and human rights in Central America and across the hemisphere. And I want to commend Costa Rica for your landmark law against the scourge of human trafficking. I'm proud to be here as you host World Press Freedom Day. So everybody from the American press corps, you should thank the people of Costa Rica for celebrating free speech and an independent press as essential pillars of our democracy.

Costa Rica shows the benefits of trade that is free and fair. Over the last few years, under the Central American Free Trade Agreement, our trade with Costa Rica has doubled, creating more jobs for people in both of our countries. Our partnerships are creating more opportunities for small businesses and entrepreneurs, including young people and women. As I told President Chinchilla, the United States will continue to be your partner as Costa Rica modernizes its economy so that you're attracting more investment and creating even more trade and more jobs.

Costa Rica, of course, has long been a leader in sustainable development that protects the environment. The President and I agreed to continue deepening our clean energy partnerships. For example, we're moving ahead with our regional efforts to ensure universal access to clean, affordable, sustainable electricity for the people of the Americas, including Costa Ricans. And this is also another way that we

can meet our shared commitments to address climate change.

The President and I reaffirmed our determination to confront the growing security concerns that have affected many Costa Rican families and communities. And under the Central America Regional Security Initiative, the United States has committed nearly half a billion dollars to help Costa Rica and its neighbors in this fight. We're disrupting drug cartels and gangs. We're working to strengthen law enforcement and the judicial system. And we're addressing the underlying forces that fuel criminality with prevention programs for at-risk youth and with economic development that gives young people hope and opportunity.

Meanwhile, as I said in Mexico yesterday, the United States recognizes that we've got responsibilities; that much of the violence in the region is fueled by demand for illegal drugs, including in the United States. So we're going to keep on pursuing a comprehensive approach not only through law enforcement, but also through education and prevention and treatment that can reduce demand.

And finally, I updated the President on our efforts in the United States to pass comprehensive immigration reform. I know this is of great interest to the entire region, especially those with families in our country. And I'm optimistic that we're going to achieve reform that reflects our heritage as both a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants: men and women and children who need to be treated with full dignity and respect.

So, President Chinchilla, thank you so much for your partnership. Thank you and the people of Costa Rica for your hospitality.

I'm told there's a well-known quote here in Costa Rica: "Where there is a Costa Rican, wherever it is, there's liberty." And in the United States, we're thankful for the many Costa Ricans who contribute to our prosperity and our liberty. And we're grateful for Costa Rica's leadership in this region, as we'll see again when President Chinchilla hosts tonight's SI-CA meeting.

I'd note that our presence at tonight's meeting with the leaders of Central America and

the Dominican Republic is a sign of the importance that the United States places on this region, as well as our commitment to being a steady and strong and reliable partner, because we believe that no matter where you live, the people of this region deserve security and opportunity and dignity.

So let me, again, say thank you, and in my best Tican: *pura vida. Muchas gracias.*

So I think we're going to go Costa Rican press first, and then I'll call on someone?

Drug Trafficking/Costa Rica

Q. Good afternoon. Welcome, President Obama. The policy of the United States for Central America has centered on drug smuggling and organized crime. Don't you think, for both Presidents, that the time has come to improve our relationships and go on to an agenda that apart from security, we have the subjects of the social aspects of education and health?

And my second question would be, if we're going to be supporting Costa Rica in subjects that were presented today in the organization of the SICA? So thank you, and welcome.

President Obama. Well, thank you very much. First of all, I completely agree with you, and I've tried to emphasize this throughout my trip: So much of the focus ends up being on security. And we understand that in the absence of security, it's very hard to develop. But we also have to recognize that problems like narcotrafficking arise in part when a country is vulnerable because of poverty, because of institutions that are not working for the people, because young people don't see a brighter future ahead.

And so what President Chinchilla and I spoke extensively about are initiatives like education, institution building and capacity, trying to create greater economic opportunity, because the stronger the economies and the institutions for legitimate—for individuals who are seeking legitimate careers, the more those are there, then the less powerful these narcotrafficking operations are going to be.

And so not only are we interested in promoting trade and highlighting the already extensive trade that we're doing, but we also

want to see how can we build on the successes to improve education even in our strategies to fight narcotrafficking. We, for example, helped to finance youth centers that can give young people a different vision for their futures. We consider that to be part of our overall effort. So it can't just be law enforcement. It also has to be human development, inclusive economic development. We've got to make sure that everybody feels opportunity.

Now, even if a country is doing well, the scourge of drugs and drug trafficking will still be there, and there still needs to be a strong law enforcement component. But we can do better than we're currently doing. And I know that President Chinchilla is taking a great interest here in Costa Rica around these human development issues.

As far as the issues that you mentioned around international organizations, as I indicated earlier, Costa Rica has shown itself to be a world leader and model around free trade, freedom of the press, democracy, respect for human rights, and that makes it an outstanding candidate for membership in the OECD, for example. And so we will expect that we'll continue to support Costa Rica in expanding its influence.

We enjoy a great partnership on, for example, regional human rights councils, as well as international human rights efforts. Costa Rica has been a real leader, and we appreciate that. And there's something very effective when large countries like the United States, smaller countries like Costa Rica share values. We come in together. And I think it's a great way to make the point that regardless of the country's size, regardless of the language that it speaks, the idea of certain universal rights that are observed for all people is important. And that's why we value this partnership so much.

President Chinchilla. Well, I was just going to add a couple of comments. And I think that it seems to me that I should start by thanking President Obama for his expressed support to the aspirations of Costa Rica for going in—for being a member of OECD. We know that there are tests that we have to comply with,

and we know that we will be able to comply with them.

And also, to add something precisely—a comment in regard to the subject of narcotraffic, organized crime. We believe that there is not a single doubt that President Obama's administration—since his coming to Mexico and now his visit here in Central America—brings along an agenda that is trying to redefine those relationships based on a greater diversity.

As it was being said, our countries are more than just in security and violence and narcotraffic. That doesn't mean that it is not an important problem, but I would like to basically finally add the following. What some other countries have done for a few years now, with the purpose of trying to review some strategies that fall under the fight against the drugs, are based basically on the fact that some of the most immediate experiences we have seen in region are experiences that have had to call upon the extreme fight of the war on drugs. Costa Rica doesn't have an army. And since we don't want to found an army, we do not want to allow ourselves to come to war scenarios to face drug smuggling or organized crime.

Many times, the journalists ask me, how has Costa Rica done to face such a big threat when you don't have an army and precisely the countries next to you do have an army? But curiously enough, Costa Rica has demonstrated that we have been more effective and more successful in fighting against these threats precisely without having an army. And what am I going to with this? That what we're looking for, for a while now, is precisely the signals that the Obama administration is sending in the sense that effective policy for the fight against drugs and narcotraffic goes through the strengthening of the institutions, through prevention, through open society, a more transparent society, and through a citizenship that is much more aware of the problem.

It seems to me that advancing in that direction is precisely advancing in the correct direction.

President Obama. All right. Mark Felsenthal of Reuters. Mark.

Syria

Q. Thank you, Mr. President, Madam President. Mr. President, on Syria, you said yesterday that anything the United States does should make the situation better, not worse. How long are you prepared to wait to determine whether chemical weapons were used? What happens when you make your determination? And will you take your case to the United Nations? And have you ruled out putting U.S. troops on the ground in Syria?

President Obama. Well, first all, I emphasized yesterday, so let me reemphasize: We're not waiting. We're not standing by. We are currently the largest humanitarian donor to deal with the crisis in Syria. We are the largest contributor to—of nonlethal aid to the opposition. We've mobilized 80 countries to support the opposition. We are working to apply every pressure point that we can on Syria, working with our international partners.

And so we are actively engaged on a day-to-day basis to try to deal with this crisis and to restore a Syria that is respectful of the rights and aspirations of the Syrian people.

Now, as I've said before, if in fact we see strong evidence that we can present and that allows us to say that the Syrian military and the Syrian Government is using chemical weapons, then that is a game changer for us because, not only is there the prospect of widespread use of chemical weapons inside of Syria, but there's the possibility that it lands in the hands of organizations like Hizballah.

We have evidence that chemical weapons have been used. We don't know when, where, or how they were used. We are initiating on our own to investigate and get a better handle on the facts inside of Syria. We're also working with the international community and our partners to try to get a better handle on what's happening, and we've already gone to the United Nations to say we want a full-blown investigation inside of Syria. So far, for unsurprising reasons, President Asad has resisted.

We will stay on this. Now, if in fact there's the kind of systematic use of chemical weapons inside of Syria, we expect that we're going to

get additional further evidence. And at that point, absolutely, we will present that to the international community, because I think this is, again, not just an American problem, this is a world problem. There are international rules and protocols and norms and ethics. And when it comes to using chemical weapons, the entire world should be concerned.

Now, in terms of what that means in terms of American action, keep in mind, we're already taking a whole range of actions. We're going to continue to take a whole range of actions. Separate and apart from the chemical weapon use, we've got tens of thousands of people who are being killed inside of Syria, and we want to see that stopped for humanitarian reasons, but also for strategic reasons.

But in terms of any additional steps that we take, it's going to be based on, number one, the facts on the ground. Number two, it's going to be based on what's in the interest of the American people and our national security. And as President of the United States, I'm going to make those decisions based on the best evidence and after careful consultation, because when we rush into things, when we leap before we look, then not only do we pay a price, but oftentimes, we see unintended consequences on the ground. So it's important for us to do it right. And that's exactly what we're doing right now. Okay?

Drug Trafficking/Central America-U.S. Relations

Q. Last question on behalf of Costa Rica, from Alvaro—[inaudible]. Good afternoon, President Obama. Good afternoon, Madam President. President Obama, 10 years ago, you were about to begin—you were about to come to the Senate. Ten years have gone by and Central America has lost more than 130,000 lives caused by drugs traffic. This has been the sacrifice that the region has had because of this problem. What is the sacrifice that in your 4 years of government you pretend to undertake for this business that feeds on the profit that are produced especially by the consumption in your country? And if the United States also believes that the best option is to use warships to

be able to surveil or keep a watch on the seas on the joint antinarcotic drug war?

And, Madam President, you have also expressed the values that the Government of Costa Rica has with the Government of the United States and your point of view with the President Obama, for example, on the subject of the international trade of weapons—of fire weapons. You say that President Obama said the time has come to recognize the rights for the bisexual couples of the United States. When is the time going to come for that in Costa Rica?

President Obama. Well, I think all of us recognize the pain and hardship that's been caused by drug trafficking and transnational drug cartels here in Central America. There's a cost obviously in the United States as well. I mean, it's not as if we don't have tragic drug problems throughout the United States. And when you look at poor communities inside of the United States, including communities in my hometown of Chicago, there are young people who are killed every day as part of the drug trade.

So this is not a situation where we do not feel the effects. There are common effects, and there are common responsibilities, which is why it's so important that we work on this on a regional basis.

Now, since I've been President, we've put our money where our mouth is. I've spent—or my administration has spent approximately \$30 billion in reducing drug demand in the United States over the last several years. And we're actually seeing an impact in terms of reduced demand. But the United States is a big country and a big market, and so progress sometimes is slower than we'd like it to be.

There is obviously a role for law enforcement. I'm not interested in militarizing the struggle against drug trafficking. This is a law enforcement problem. And if we have effective law enforcement cooperation and coordination, and if we build up capacity for countries in Central America, then we can continue to make progress.

But the important thing that I've tried to emphasize throughout is that this is a common

problem. This is one where we'll only solve it when we're working together. It has adverse effects in all of our countries. But—last point I'd make—I think it's very important to make sure that our bilateral relationship and the United States relationship with the region as a whole is not solely defined by this problem. Because when it is, we're missing all the opportunities that exist out there.

When I got off the plane, I was greeted by Dr. Chang, obviously a well-known scientist here, who worked at NASA and is working now on developing a whole new vision for clean energy, and he brought along four young people, these incredibly talented young people who are in their last year of high school here. And all four of them, thanks to some of the good work of our Ambassador and others, will be attending universities in the United States next fall.

And when you talk to those young people, there's incredible hope and incredible promise and incredible optimism. And I don't want every story to be about drug traffickers and nobody is writing a story about those four young people and what they represent in terms of the future of Costa Rica and the future of this region.

President Chinchilla. Every nation or every society has its own way of evolving towards the responses that have to be provided to the different demands of the social groups and of the different collectiveness that a country might have.

And when we analyze the evolution of the different nations, we see how some of them have advanced a little more acceleratedly and to subjects maybe of commitment towards the environment, in subjects, for example, for the control of some important aspects in the subject of protection of human life, like for example, the subject of the control of the fire weapons. And others are advancing furthermore in the recognition of certain rights, among them like the one that you have mentioned, the rights of the couples of the same sex.

The important thing, Alvaro, is that we cannot simply pass on or go beyond the rhythm or the evolution of the debates from one nation to

another. Each one of the nations has its own rhythm. The important thing here, I believe—and what is of worth here—is that in Costa Rica the framework precisely of democracy that has characterized us, the debate has to be an open debate, a live debate, an active debate—a debate like the one that I have in qualifying it—that has to take place with the greatest of respect without putting a stigma on the different positions that are proper to the debates that take place in a democracy.

And only the mature, ripened, seasoned debate will end up giving the result that will have to give—be given where it has to be given, which is inside the Parliament. So it seems to me that that is what is important, that the debate in Costa Rica is an open debate, a free debate that has to continue as a debate without restrictions.

That is why I have advocated and restated opportunities in my recent report to the nation that this is a dialogue that has been faced sometimes inconveniently on some positions that take sides. And as long as this is faced in this way, I think that the advancement is going to be very slow. I hope and I trust that the debate might really be a much more balanced, much more mature dialogue, without putting stigmas on it, and that this might eventually generate a decision in the Congress of the Republic.

President Obama. Okay, last question. Lisa [Lisa Lerer, Bloomberg News].

Syria/Immigration Reform

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Senator Leahy is pushing for a bill on recognizing same-sex couples as part of the immigration bill. Are you concerned at all that that undermines the success of the package? And given that you made a point throughout your Presidency to make clear that you don't think LGTB Americans should be treated any differently, will you sign a bill that will do exactly that?

And for you, Madam President, is there any concern that the more—that by creating more stringent immigration standards could hamper the ability of Costa Ricans to emigrate to the U.S.? Thanks.

President Obama. Lisa, I hope you don't mind, before I answer your question, I want to get back to Mark because I realize there was one clause in your question—sometimes, you guys have a lot of clauses in your question—that I didn't specifically answer, and I didn't want anybody to extrapolate from that.

You asked about boots on the ground and whether we've ruled boots out on the ground in Syria. As a general rule, I don't rule things out as Commander in Chief, because circumstances change, and you want to make sure that I always have the full power of the United States at our disposal to meet American national security interests.

Having said that, I do not foresee a scenario in which boots on the ground in Syria, American boots on the ground in Syria, would not only be good for America, but also would be good for Syria. And by the way, when I consult with leaders in the region who are very much interested in seeing President Asad leave office and stabilizing the situation in Syria, they agree with that assessment.

So just wanted to make sure that my omission there did not turn into a story.

To your question, Lisa, as I've indicated, I've got four broad criteria for immigration reform. I want to make sure that our border is secure and well regulated, in part so that we can get down to the business of smoothing trade and commerce across our borders and creating jobs in the United States, but also making sure that negative actors aren't able to penetrate the United States.

Number two, cracking down on employers who are breaking the law. Number three, making sure we've got a legal immigration system that works better, smarter, and so that we can continue to attract the best and the brightest to the United States.

And by the way, when it comes to legal immigration, the issue here is not going to be stringency, per se, the issue is do we make the system more rational, more effective, better. If there are smart engineers and young people and scientists who—and students who are looking to emigrate to the United States from Costa Rica, then we want them to know that

we're a nation of immigrants. But we want to make sure that the legal process is in place so that it's easier and simpler, but also more effective in managing the legal immigration process.

And finally, that we've got a pathway so that the 11 million or so undocumented workers inside the United States are able to pursue a tough, long, difficult, but fair path to legal status and citizenship.

So those are my broad-based criteria. Now, the provision that you've discussed that Senator Leahy has talked about is one that I support, and I've said in the past that the LGBT community should be treated like everybody else. That's, to me, the essential, core principle behind our founding documents, the idea that we're all created equal and that we're equal before the law and it's applied fairly to everybody.

And so Senator Leahy may present this provision in committee. It may be presented on the floor. It will be one of many amendments and provisions that are presented, some of which I'll support, some of which I'll think are really bad ideas. And I think that the general principle for me is, are we advancing, are we improving the immigration system? Because ultimately, this is an immigration bill.

And we'll evaluate the end product. I think it's premature for me to start talking about what I will or will not do before I get a final product since the road is going to be long and bumpy before I finally see an actual bill on my desk. But I can tell you, I think that the provision is the right thing to do.

I can also tell you that I'm not going to get everything I want in this bill. Republicans are not going to get everything that they want in this bill. But if we keep focused on what our main aim is here, which is creating a smart, effective immigration system that allows us to be a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, then we're going to be in a position to not only improve our economy and what's happening inside the United States, I—we're going to, I think, have a much stronger relationship with the region. And that's going to help enhance our economy and jobs and our growth over the long term.

And, last point I'll make, as is true with every bill, if there are things that end up being left out in this bill or things that I want to take out of a bill, but if it's meeting those core criteria around a comprehensive immigration bill that I'm looking for, then we go back at it, and we fix what's not there, and we continually improve what's been presented.

I think that this comprehensive immigration bill has the opportunity to do something historic that we have not done in decades. But I don't expect that, after we're finished with it, that people are going to say, there's not a single problem that we have with our immigration system, any more than is true after any piece of legislation that we pass. All right?

Well, thank you very much everybody. *Muchas gracias*.

President Chinchilla. Thank you very much. Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 4:55 p.m. at the National Center for Art and Culture. In his remarks, the President referred to Franklin Chang Diaz, president and chief executive officer, Ad Astra Rocket Company; Bryan Badilla, Katherine Fernandez, John Junior, and Genesis Soto, recipients of the Franklin Chang Scholarship to study in the U.S. as part of the 100,000 Strong in the Americas exchange initiative; and U.S. Ambassador to Costa Rica Anne Slaughter Andrew. He also referred to the Central American Integration System (SICA). President Chinchilla and some reporters spoke in Spanish, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks at a Dinner for Central American Integration System Leaders in San Jose May 3, 2013

[*The President's remarks were joined in progress.*]

—during this visit. And I want to thank you for your thoughtful presentation about some of the agenda items that we need to address.

We last met as a group during the Summit of the Americas in 2009. And I was mentioning that at that time, I had less gray hair than you see today. I know that the United States is technically here in our observer status, and sometimes, that means that you observe, but don't speak, so I know that you're all indulging me by allowing to say a few words. But I am here, more than anything, to listen and hear the concerns that all of you have not only individually, but collectively as a region.

This is a region that has more than 40 million people. Every day they work to give their families and children a better life, and we're grateful for the strong bonds between the United States and the people who trace their origins to the countries that are represented at this table.

As governments, our job is to make sure that we're doing everything we can to provide security and opportunity and ladders for success and prosperity for our people: economic growth that creates jobs, security for people so that they can be safe in their own neighborhoods, and development that allows people to live in dignity. And so that's why we're here.

The agenda is a broad-based, socially inclusive agenda that ensures that our entire region and hemisphere are prospering. And in pursuit of that, I think some of the issues that President Chinchilla mentioned are going to be vital.

Number one, we need to think about investments in our infrastructure—roads, bridges, border crossings, customs, electricity grids—all of which can allow for more trade, more growth, more jobs. As I mentioned as we were walking in, this is a very competitive global environment. And it's important for us to recognize that if the hemisphere is working effectively together, all of us benefit. And if we're not, then we will lose in that competition to other regions. And we know that trade and