

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.*

## 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.

*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.

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

investment flows to areas where there are strong public institutions, where there's accountability and transparency and effective governance. And I think one of the things that we need to talk about is how we can work together to help each other in those areas.

The second area that has been mentioned is energy. Costa Rica has shown great leadership in clean energy. And as somebody who believes in the challenges of climate change—and I think that everybody in Central America has to be concerned about that given the history of natural disasters and the severe costs that take place here. We want to continue to pursue a whole range of energy strategies for the future: solar, wind, hydropower. It is true that the United States has been making great progress in oil and natural gas development due to new technologies. And I know that's something that's of interest to you, so that's an area that we can discuss.

But the bottom line is, my concern is helping every country at this table reduce its energy costs, making its economy more efficient, because when you have high power costs, that's not only a tax on your citizens effectively, but it's also a situation that impedes growth over the long term. And so that's an area where we're very interested in helping.

Investing in people: In this knowledge-based economy, if we don't have the best workers in the world, the most highly skilled and trained workers in the world, then we're going to lose. And it's important to recognize that we need high-skilled labor throughout the hemisphere, because our economies have become more integrated. And if you look at that global value chain, we want to be not at the bottom, but we want to be nearer to the top because that means more prosperity for our people. So everything we can do to train our young people in math, science, technology, and everything we can do to pool our resources to help achieve those goals, I think, will end up benefiting everybody.

And by the way, I think it's very important, those countries that are succeeding are investing in the development of their young people,

not just some young people, but women and girls, indigenous communities. It's important that we don't go onto the field with just half our team. We've got to make sure that the entire team is on the field. That's how we're going to succeed.

And then finally, the issue of citizen security, obviously, that's something that's important. During this trip I've tried to make the point that we are interested in cooperating with every country around issues of citizen security. We know what a major toll it's taken. We are obviously deeply concerned about narcotrafficking and the drug trade.

I was asked a question about this in a press conference that President Chinchilla and I were doing, and the questioner suggested, given all the violence that is taking place in Central America, how does America feel about that? And I had to remind people that we have violence in the United States. If you go to my hometown of Chicago, and you go to some neighborhoods, they're just as violent, if not more violent, than some of the countries at this table, in part because of the pernicious influence of the drug trade.

And so—but what I also believe is that we can't just have a law-enforcement-only approach. We also have to have a prevention approach. We have to have an education approach. We have to think creatively, because obviously, some of the things that we're doing have worked, but some things haven't worked. We've got to think about institution building and capacity in our law enforcement and our judicial systems. Those are all going to be very important, and I know that the work that we've done together has made some progress, but I'm interested in learning more about other things that we can do.

So I've spoken long enough considering I'm an observer, but I just want to again say thank you to all of you for taking the time to come meet with me. I know that all of you are extraordinarily busy and have great demands on your time. So for you to come in is something that I'm very grateful for, and I'm looking forward to a good discussion.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:40 p.m. in the foyer of the National Theater. In his remarks,

he referred to President Laura Chinchilla Miranda of Costa Rica.

## The President's Weekly Address *May 4, 2013*

Hi, everybody. Today I'm speaking to you from the road, a trip to Mexico and Costa Rica. I'm here because Latin America represents an incredible opportunity for the United States, especially when it comes to my top priority as President, which is creating good, middle class jobs.

On Friday, we learned that our businesses created another 176,000 jobs last month. And that's 2.2 million new jobs over the past year and 6.8 million new jobs over the past 38 months. But as I've said before, I won't be satisfied until everyone who wants a job can find one. So I'm going to keep doing everything I can and go everywhere I need to go to help our businesses create jobs.

Now, one of the best ways to grow our economy is to sell more goods and services made in America to the rest of the world. And that includes our neighbors to the south. Right now over 40 percent of our exports go to the Americas. And those exports are growing faster than our trade with the rest of the world. And that's why I visited Latin America this week, to work with leaders to deepen our economic ties and expand trade between our nations.

In Mexico, I also talked about immigration reform because that's an important issue that affects both our countries. The truth is, right now our border with Mexico is more secure than it's been in years. We've put more boots on that border than at any time in our history, and illegal crossings are down by nearly 80 percent from their peak in 2000. But we've got more to do, not just to secure the border, but to fix an immigration system that is badly broken.

In recent weeks, we've seen a commonsense immigration reform bill introduced in the Senate. This bill is a compromise, which means that nobody got everything they wanted, including me. But it's largely consistent with the principles I've laid out from the beginning.

It would continue to strengthen security at our borders and hold employers more accountable if they knowingly hire undocumented workers. It would provide a pathway to earned citizenship for the 11 million individuals who are already living in this country illegally. And it would modernize our legal immigration system so that we're able to reunite families and attract the highly skilled entrepreneurs and engineers who will help create good paying jobs and grow our economy.

These are all commonsense steps that the majority of Americans support. So there's no reason that immigration reform can't become a reality this year.

In the meantime, I'll keep working with our neighbors on our common security and our common prosperity. Millions of Americans earn a living right now because of the trade between our nations. And after this week, I'm as confident as ever that we can build on our shared heritage and values to open more markets for American businesses and create more jobs for American workers.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 10:10 a.m. on May 3 at the National Anthropology Museum in Mexico City, Mexico, for broadcast on May 4. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on May 3, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on May 4.