

tactical, partisan thinking that has come to so dominate Washington and to start moving in a direction in which we're just trying to get stuff done.

Which doesn't mean that there aren't going to be politics involved; it doesn't mean that there are not going to be some rough and tumble. And one thing that I think folks like myself and Michael and Kasim and others learned is that if you get in this business, folks are going to take their shots at you. And I've got the gray hair to prove it. [Laughter] But that kind of stuff doesn't bother me, and I know it doesn't bother others who are in elected office, if we feel like we're getting stuff done. If we feel that, at the end of the day, when we look back on our public service, we can say, you know what, this country is stronger, better positioned for the future than it was before.

And I think we have that possibility. And you're starting to see in Washington some sense, even among the most partisan folks there, that we've, kind of—the balance has tipped too far away from getting stuff done. And that's why, for example, I'm optimistic about our capacity to get immigration reform done. Michael is one of the group of eight that's been putting this together, seeing four Democrats, four Republicans, who are sitting down and methodically, systematically just trying to fix a broken system because they understand that it needs to get done and that if, in fact, we're able to preserve our identity as a nation of laws and a nation of immigrants, our economy is going to be strong, and we're going to be better positioned to compete all around the world.

So the upshot is this: Despite sometimes the doom and gloom of what you hear emanating out of Washington, you should be optimistic about this country. I sure am. I think that we are on track with just a few important decisions that are well within our capacity to make sure that the 21st century is the American century just like the 20th century was.

But we can't do it alone. What I told those young Morehouse men is that it's not enough that you now have succeeded individually, you now have a broader obligation to this country and to the world. And all of you who, in this room, have been so successful in so many different walks of life, I hope you still feel that sense of obligation, that sense of citizenship, that sense of giving back. That's what built this country. That's its essence. And with your help, that's the kind of spirit that Michael and I and others want to continue to bring to Washington for as long as we can. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:12 p.m. at the Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation. In his remarks, he referred to Sen. Michael F. Bennet, in his capacity as chair of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee; Sylvia Reed, mother of Mayor M. Kasim Reed of Atlanta, GA; Arthur M. Blank, owner, National Football League's Atlanta Falcons, and his mother Molly Blank; Betsegaw Tadele and Leland Shelton, 2013 graduates, Morehouse College; and Sens. Marco A. Rubio, Jeffrey L. Flake, John S. McCain III, Lindsey O. Graham, Richard J. Durbin, Robert Menendez, and Charles E. Schumer.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Thein Sein of Burma May 20, 2013

President Obama. I want to welcome President Thein Sein to the United States of America and to the Oval Office.

Last year, I was proud to make a historic visit to Myanmar as the first U.S. President ever to visit that country. And now President Sein is able to return the favor by making a visit to the

United States, and my understanding is that this is the first visit by a leader of Myanmar in almost 50 years.

Obviously, during this period in between, there have been significant bilateral tensions between our countries. But what has allowed this shift in relations is the leadership that

President Sein has shown in moving Myanmar down a path of both political and economic reform.

Over the last 2 years, we've seen a steady process in which political prisoners, including Aung San Suu Kyi, have been released and have been incorporated into the political process.

We've seen credible elections and a legislature that is continuing to make strides in the direction of more inclusivity and greater representation of all the various groups within Myanmar.

President Sein has also made genuine efforts to resolve longstanding ethnic conflicts within the country and has recognized the need to establish laws that respect the rights of the people of Myanmar.

As a consequence of these changes in policy inside of Myanmar, the United States has been able to relax sanctions that had been placed on Myanmar, and many countries around the world have followed suit.

And this has also allowed the United States and other countries to—and international institutions to participate in engagement with the Myanmar Government about how we can be helpful in spurring economic development that is broad based and that produces concrete results for the people of Myanmar. And that includes the prospect of increasing trade and investment in Myanmar, which can produce jobs and higher standards of living.

But as President Sein is the first to admit, this is a long journey and there is still much work to be done. And during our discussions, President Thein shared with me the fact—the manner in which he intends to continue to move forward on releasing more political prisoners; making sure that the Government of Myanmar institutionalizes some of the political reforms that have already taken place; how rule of law is codified so that it continues into the future; and the process whereby these ethnic conflicts that have existed are resolved not simply by a cease-fire, but an actual incorporation of all these communities into the political process.

I also shared with President Sein our deep concern about communal violence that has been directed at Muslim communities inside of Myanmar. The displacement of people, the violence directed towards them needs to stop, and we are prepared to work in any ways that we can with both the Government of Myanmar and the international community to assure that people are getting the help that they need, but more importantly, that their rights and their dignity is recognized over the long term.

As I indicated to President Sein, countries that are successful are countries that tap into the talents of all people and respect the rights of all people. And I'm confident that if Myanmar follows that recipe, that it will be not only a successful democracy, but also a thriving economy.

We also discussed some very concrete projects that we've already initiated. For example, USAID is already working to evaluate how we can improve agricultural productivity in Myanmar; that can benefit farmers, increase incomes, and improve standards of living in a largely agricultural country.

And we're also working, for example, on projects like improving the road that currently exists between Rangoon and Mandalay.

Finally, I wanted to thank President Sein for his participation in ASEAN and the East Asia Summit in which the United States is actively engaged in all the countries in Southeast Asia, as part of our broader refocusing on the Asia-Pacific region, a region of enormous growth and potential with which we want to continue to strengthen our bonds.

So, Mr. President, welcome to the United States of America. We very much appreciate your efforts and leadership in leading Myanmar in a new direction, and we want you to know that the United States will make every effort to assist you on what I know is a long and sometimes difficult, but ultimately, correct path to follow.

President Thein Sein. I would like to express my sincere thanks to President Obama for inviting me to come to the United States. Indeed, this is my very first visit to Washington, DC, as well as to the White House.

And I am also very pleased to have this opportunity to discuss about the democratization process and reform process undertaken in my country.

Our two countries established diplomatic relations since 1947, a year before our independence. And since then, we have been able to enjoy—historically, our two countries have enjoyed cordial relations, and there were also exchange of—high-level exchange of visits between our two countries.

But I have to say that in the past, there were difficulties or difficulties in our bilateral relationship. But now we are very pleased that our relations have been improved significantly, and I am very thankful that in 50 years, I am repaying a visit to the United States at the invitation of President Obama. And I am very grateful for extending an invitation to me to pay a visit to the United States.

Now that our country, Myanmar, has started to practice democratic system, so we can say that we have—both our countries have similar political system in our two countries.

As you all know, our government is just—our democratic government is just 2 years old. And we have—within the 2—short period of 2 years, our government have carried out political and economic reforms in our country. Because we are in a very nascent stage of democratic—a democratic stage, we still need a lot of democratic experience and practices to be learned. And we have seen successes. At the same time, we have been encountering obstacles and challenges along our democratization process, our path.

And the improvement in our relation is also in recognition—U.S. Government's recognition of our democratization efforts and my—our genuine efforts for democratization process in our country. And it is also due to—thanks to the President Obama's reengagement policy to reengage with our country so that we have seen improvement in our bilateral relations within a short period of time.

Myanmar, being a developing country, and as we are undertaking changes of our democratization reforms, it is a daunting task ahead of us. We encounter many challenges, such as, at

present, our poverty rate in the country is quite high, and we have very few job opportunities. And then, as well as, we have a—we do not have much middle class in our country. And then we still—our people needs to be more familiar with democratic practice, democratic norms and values.

So we have a lot of challenges ahead of us, but we have to—thanks to the U.S. Government and the people's support and their understanding that we will be able to encounter these challenges as we undertake the reform process in our country.

During our—my meeting with—our discussion with President, as he have already elaborated, we discussed about the rule of law in our country; the strengthening of judicial bodies; and the providing necessary assistance so that our police and military force become professional forces. And then to—we also discussed what related to the poverty alleviation to—for the rural people and farmers, agricultural development, as well as health—uplifting the health and education sectors of our countries.

So we had a very fruitful discussion with President Obama, and then I should—I must say that I am very pleased to have this opportunity to have a candid and frank discussion with President Obama. And I believe that I have—my success—my visit to the United States is quite successful and meaningful.

For in—for democracy to flourish in our country, we will have to move forward, and we will have to undertake reforms, political reforms and economic reforms, in the years ahead. We will also have to—we are trying our best with our own resources—our own efforts to have political and economic reforms in our country. But we will also need—along this path, we will also need the assistance and understanding from the international community, including the United States.

And what I want to say is that President Obama has frequently used the word “forward.” And I will take this opportunity to reiterate that Myanmar and I will continue to take the forward—move forward so that we will have—we can build a new democratic state—a new Myanmar, a new democratic state in our country.

I thank you all.

President Obama. Thank you so much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his re-

marks, he referred to Member of Parliament and National League for Democracy Party Leader Aung San Suu Kyi of Burma. President Thein Sein spoke in Burmese, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter.

Remarks on the Tornadoes in Oklahoma *May 21, 2013*

Good morning, everybody. As we all know by now, a series of storms swept across the Plains yesterday, and one of the most destructive tornadoes in history sliced through the towns of Newcastle and Moore, Oklahoma. In an instant, neighborhoods were destroyed. Dozens of people lost their lives. Many more were injured. And among the victims were young children, trying to take shelter in the safest place they knew, their school.

So our prayers are with the people of Oklahoma today.

Our gratitude is with the teachers who gave their all to shield their children, with the neighbors, first responders and emergency personnel who raced to help as soon as the tornado passed, and with all of those who, as darkness fell, searched for survivors through the night.

As a nation, our full focus right now is on the urgent work of rescue and the hard work of recovery and rebuilding that lies ahead.

Yesterday I spoke with Governor Fallin to make it clear to Oklahomans that they would have all the resources that they need at their disposal. Last night, I issued a disaster declaration to expedite those resources, to support the Governor's team in the immediate response, and to offer direct assistance to folks who have suffered loss. I also just spoke with Mayor Lewis of Moore, Oklahoma, to ensure that he's getting everything that he needs.

I've met with Secretary Napolitano this morning and my Homeland Security and Counterterrorism Adviser, Lisa Monaco, to underscore that point that Oklahoma needs to get everything that it needs right away. The FEMA Administrator, Craig Fugate, is on his way to Oklahoma as we speak. FEMA staff was first deployed to Oklahoma's Emergency Op-

erations Center on Sunday, as the State already was facing down the first wave of deadly tornadoes. Yesterday FEMA activated urban search and rescue teams from Texas, Nebraska, and Tennessee to assist in the ongoing search and rescue efforts and a mobile response unit to boost communications and logistical support.

So the people of Moore should know that their country will remain on the ground, there for them, beside them as long as it takes. For there are homes and schools to rebuild, businesses and hospitals to reopen, there are parents to console, first responders to comfort, and of course, frightened children who will need our continued love and attention.

There are empty spaces where there used to be living rooms, and bedrooms, and classrooms, and in time, we're going to need to refill those spaces with love and laughter and community.

We don't yet know the full extent of the damage from this week's storm. We don't know both the human and economic losses that may have occurred. We know that severe rumbling of weather, bad weather, through much of the country still continues, and we're also preparing for a hurricane season that begins next week.

But if there is hope to hold on to—not just in Oklahoma, but around the country—it's the knowledge that the good people there and in Oklahoma are better prepared for this type of storm than most. And what they can be certain of is that Americans from every corner of this country will be right there with them, opening our homes, our hearts to those in need. Because we're a nation that stands with our fellow citizens as long as it takes. We've seen that spirit in Joplin, in Tuscaloosa; we saw that spirit in Boston and Breezy Point. And that's what