

Statement on the Resignation of Eugene B. Sperling as Director of the National Economic Council and the Appointment of Jeffrey D. Zients as Director of the National Economic Council

September 13, 2013

Over the past 4½ years, Gene has been one of my closest advisors and a close friend. Gene understands better than anybody that our top priority as a nation is making sure that our economy once again works for working Americans. Gene’s impact in this administration began at Treasury, where he helped us avoid a second Great Depression and led efforts to pass a Small Business Jobs Act to help entrepreneurs grow. He has been a tireless proponent of efforts to strengthen the recovery and make our Tax Code more fair, whether in helping to design the payroll tax cut, fighting for job-creating tax credits for tens of millions of hard-working Americans or developing the “American Jobs Act.” He was central to designing policies to help support the housing recovery and was a driving force behind our manufacturing agenda and our efforts to attract jobs and investment to the United States.

Gene’s relentless work ethic, sharp intellect, and ability to work across the aisle have been instrumental in our efforts to build a better

bargain for the middle class and reduce the deficit while also protecting the most vulnerable. I want to thank Gene and his family for their service, and I look forward to having his counsel for the rest of the year.

Today I’m also proud to name Jeff Zients as the next Director of the National Economic Council. Before heading up the Office of Management and Budget, Jeff spent decades as a successful entrepreneur in the private sector. Jeff has a sterling reputation as a business leader, and he earned the admiration and respect of everyone he worked with during his 4 years in leadership positions at the Office of Management and Budget. I am certain that in Jeff’s hands we will continue to have strong leadership of our economic policy team, and his advice will be critical as we keep moving this country forward and building an economy where everyone who works hard can get ahead.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a biography of Mr. Zients.

The President’s Weekly Address

September 14, 2013

This week, when I addressed the Nation on Syria, I said that, in part because of the credible threat of U.S. military force, there is the possibility of a diplomatic solution. Russia has indicated a new willingness to join with the international community in pushing Syria to give up its chemical weapons, which the Asad regime used in an attack that killed more than a thousand people on August 21. I also asked Congress to postpone a vote on the use of military force while we pursue this diplomatic path. And that’s what we’re doing.

At my direction, Secretary of State Kerry is in discussions with his Russian counterpart. But we’re making it clear that this can’t be a stalling tactic. Any agreement needs to verify

that the Asad regime and Russia are keeping their commitments. That means working to turn Syria’s chemical weapons over to international control and ultimately destroying them. This would allow us to achieve our goal: deterring the Syrian regime from using chemical weapons, degrading their ability to use them, and making it clear to the world that we won’t tolerate their use.

We’ve seen indications of progress. As recently as a week ago, the Asad regime would not admit that it possessed chemical weapons. Today, it does. Syria has signaled a willingness to join with 189 other nations, representing 98 percent of humanity, in abiding by an international agreement that prohibits the use of

chemical weapons. And Russia has staked its own credibility on supporting this outcome.

These are all positive developments. We'll keep working with the international community to see that Asad gives up his chemical weapons so that they can be destroyed. We will continue rallying support from allies around the world who agree on the need for action to deter the use of chemical weapons in Syria. And if current discussions produce a serious plan, I'm prepared to move forward with it.

But we are not just going to take Russia and Asad's word for it. We need to see concrete actions to demonstrate that Asad is serious about giving up his chemical weapons. And since this plan emerged only with a credible threat of U.S. military action, we will maintain our military posture in the region to keep the pressure on the Asad regime. And if diplomacy fails, the United States and the international community must remain prepared to act.

The use of chemical weapons anywhere in the world is an affront to human dignity and a

threat to the security of people everywhere. As I have said for weeks, the international community must respond to this outrage. A dictator must not be allowed to gas children in their beds with impunity. And we cannot risk poison gas becoming the new weapon of choice for tyrants and terrorists the world over.

We have a duty to preserve a world free from the fear of chemical weapons for our children. But if there is any chance of achieving that goal without resorting to force, then I believe we have a responsibility to pursue that path. Thank you.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 5:20 p.m. on September 13 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on September 14. In the address, the President referred to Minister of Foreign Affairs Sergey Viktorovich Lavrov of Russia. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on September 13, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on September 14.

Statement on the Framework Agreement Between Russia and the United States on the Elimination of Chemical Weapons in Syria *September 14, 2013*

I welcome the progress made between the United States and Russia through our talks in Geneva, which represents an important, concrete step toward the goal of moving Syria's chemical weapons under international control so that they may ultimately be destroyed. This framework provides the opportunity for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons in a transparent, expeditious, and verifiable manner, which could end the threat these weapons pose not only to the Syrian people, but to the region and the world. The international community expects the Asad regime to live up to its public commitments.

While we have made important progress, much more work remains to be done. The United States will continue working with Russia, the United Kingdom, France, the United Nations, and others to ensure that this process is verifiable and that there are consequences

should the Asad regime not comply with the framework agreed today. And if diplomacy fails, the United States remains prepared to act.

Following the Asad regime's use of chemical weapons to kill more than 1,000 men, women, and children on August 21, I decided that the United States must take action to deter the Syrian regime from using chemical weapons, degrade their ability to use them, and make clear to the world that we will not tolerate their use. In part because of the credible threat of U.S. military force, we now have the opportunity to achieve our objectives through diplomacy. I spoke to Secretary Kerry earlier today and thanked him for his tireless and effective efforts on behalf of our Nation. I also spoke to Ambassador Samantha Power, who will ably lead our follow-on negotiations at the U.N. Security Council in New York.