

## The President's News Conference August 9, 2013

*The President.* Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat.

Over the past few weeks, I've been talking about what I believe should be our number-one priority as a country: building a better bargain for the middle class and for Americans who want to work their way into the middle class. And at the same time, I'm focused on my number-one responsibility as Commander in Chief, and that's keeping the American people safe. And in recent days, we've been reminded once again about the threats to our Nation.

As I said at the National Defense University back in May, in meeting those threats, we have to strike the right balance between protecting our security and preserving our freedoms. And as part of this rebalancing, I called for a review of our surveillance programs. Unfortunately, rather than an orderly and lawful process to debate these issues and come up with appropriate reforms, repeated leaks of classified information have initiated the debate in a very passionate, but not always fully informed way.

Now, keep in mind that as a Senator, I expressed a healthy skepticism about these programs, and as President, I've taken steps to make sure they have strong oversight by all three branches of Government and clear safeguards to prevent abuse and protect the rights of the American people. But given the history of abuse by governments, it's right to ask questions about surveillance, particularly as technology is reshaping every aspect of our lives.

I'm also mindful of how these issues are viewed overseas because American leadership around the world depends upon the example of American democracy and American openness. Because what makes us different from other countries is not simply our ability to secure our Nation, it's the way we do it: with open debate and democratic process.

In other words, it's not enough for me, as President, to have confidence in these programs. The American people need to have confidence in them as well. And that's why, over the last few weeks, I've consulted Mem-

bers of Congress who come at this issue from many different perspectives. I've asked the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board to review where our counterterrorism efforts and our values come into tension, and I directed my national security team to be more transparent and to pursue reforms of our laws and practices.

And so today I'd like to discuss four specific steps—not all inclusive, but some specific steps—that we're going to be taking very shortly to move the debate forward.

First, I will work with Congress to pursue appropriate reforms to section 215 of the PATRIOT Act, the program that collects telephone records. As I've said, this program is an important tool in our effort to disrupt terrorist plots. And it does not allow the Government to listen to any phone calls without a warrant. But given the scale of this program, I understand the concerns of those who would worry that it could be subject to abuse. So after having a dialogue with Members of Congress and civil libertarians, I believe that there are steps we can take to give the American people additional confidence that there are additional safeguards against abuse.

For instance, we can take steps to put in place greater oversight, greater transparency, and constraints on the use of this authority. So I look forward to working with Congress to meet those objectives.

Second, I'll work with Congress to improve the public's confidence in the oversight conducted by the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, known as the FISC. The FISC was created by Congress to provide judicial review of certain intelligence activities so that a Federal judge must find that our actions are consistent with the Constitution. However, to build greater confidence, I think we should consider some additional changes to the FISC.

One of the concerns that people raise is that a judge reviewing a request from the Government to conduct programmatic surveillance only hears one side of the story: may tilt it too

far in favor of security; may not pay enough attention to liberty. And while I've got confidence in the court and I think they've done a fine job, I think we can provide greater assurances that the court is looking at these issues from both perspectives: security and privacy.

So, specifically, we can take steps to make sure civil liberties concerns have an independent voice in appropriate cases by ensuring that the Government's position is challenged by an adversary.

Number three, we can and must be more transparent. So I've directed the intelligence community to make public as much information about these programs as possible. We've already declassified unprecedented information about the NSA, but we can go further. So at my direction, the Department of Justice will make public the legal rationale for the Government's collection activities under section 215 of the PATRIOT Act. The NSA is taking steps to put in place a full-time civil liberties and privacy officer and released information that details its mission, authorities, and oversight. And finally, the intelligence community is creating a website that will serve as a hub for further transparency, and this will give Americans and the world the ability to learn more about what our intelligence community does and what it doesn't do, how it carries out its mission, and why it does so.

Fourth, we're forming a high-level group of outside experts to review our entire intelligence and communications technologies. We need new thinking for a new era. We now have to unravel terrorist plots by finding a needle in a haystack of global telecommunications. And meanwhile, technology has given Governments, including our own, unprecedented capability to monitor communications.

So I am tasking this independent group to step back and review our capabilities, particularly our surveillance technologies. And they'll consider how we can maintain the trust of the people; how we can make sure that there absolutely is no abuse in terms of how these surveillance technologies are used; ask how surveillance impacts our foreign policy, particularly in an age when more and more information is be-

coming public. And they will provide an interim report in 60 days and a final report by the end of this year so that we can move forward with a better understanding of how these programs impact our security, our privacy, and our foreign policy.

So all these steps are designed to ensure that the American people can trust that our efforts are in line with our interests and our values. And to others around the world, I want to make clear once again that America is not interested in spying on ordinary people. Our intelligence is focused, above all, on finding the information that's necessary to protect our people and, in many cases, protect our allies.

It's true, we have significant capabilities. What's also true is we show a restraint that many governments around the world don't even think to do, refuse to show, and that includes, by the way, some of America's most vocal critics. Now, we shouldn't forget the difference between the ability of our Government to collect information online under strict guidelines and for narrow purposes and the willingness of some other governments to throw their own citizens in prison for what they say online.

And let me close with one additional thought. The men and women of our intelligence community work every single day to keep us safe because they love this country and believe in our values. They're patriots. And I believe that those who have lawfully raised their voices on behalf of privacy and civil liberties are also patriots who love our country and want it to live up to our highest ideals. So this is how we're going to resolve our differences in the United States: through vigorous public debate, guided by our Constitution, with reverence for our history as a nation of laws, and with respect for the facts.

So with that, I'm going to take some questions. And let's see who we've got here. We're going to start with Julie Pace of AP.

*Russia-U.S. Relations/2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, Russia*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I wanted to ask about some of the foreign policy fallout from the disclosure of the NSA programs that

you discussed. Your spokesman said yesterday that there's no question that the U.S. relationship with Russia has gotten worse since Vladimir Putin took office. How much of that decline do you attribute directly to Mr. Putin, given that you seem to have had a good working relationship with his predecessor? Also, will there be any additional punitive measures taken against Russia for granting asylum to Edward Snowden? Or is canceling the September summit really all you can do given the host of issues the U.S. needs Russian cooperation for? Thank you.

*The President.* Good. I think there's always been some tension in the U.S.-Russian relationship after the fall of the Soviet Union. There's been cooperation in some areas; there's been competition in others.

It is true that in my first 4 years, in working with President Medvedev, we made a lot of progress. And we got START done—or the START II done. We were able to cooperate together on Iran sanctions. They provided us help in terms of supplying our troops in Afghanistan. We were able to get Russia into the WTO, which is not just good for Russia, it's good for our companies and businesses because they're more likely then to follow international norms and rules. So there's been a lot of good work that has been done and that is going to continue to be done.

What's also true is, is that when President Putin—who was Prime Minister when Medvedev was President—came back into power, I think we saw more rhetoric on the Russian side that was anti-American, that played into some of the old stereotypes about the cold war contest between the United States and Russia. And I've encouraged Mr. Putin to think forward as opposed to backwards on those issues, with mixed success.

And I think the latest episode is just one more in a number of emerging differences that we've seen over the last several months around Syria, around human rights issues, where it is probably appropriate for us to take a pause, reassess where it is that Russia is going, what our core interests are, and calibrate the relationship so that we're doing things that are good

for the United States and, hopefully, good for Russia as well, but recognizing that there just are going to be some differences and we're not going to be able to completely disguise them.

And that's okay. Keep in mind that although I'm not attending the summit, I'll still be going to St. Petersburg because Russia is hosting the G-20. That's important business in terms of our economy and our jobs and all the issues that are of concern to Americans.

I know that one question that's been raised is, how do we approach the Olympics? I want to just make very clear right now, I do not think it's appropriate to boycott the Olympics. We've got a bunch of Americans out there who are training hard, who are doing everything they can to succeed. Nobody is more offended than me by some of the anti-gay and lesbian legislation that you've been seeing in Russia. But as I said just this week, I've spoken out against that not just with respect to Russia, but a number of other countries where we continue to do work with them, but we have a strong disagreement on this issue.

And one of the things I'm really looking forward to is maybe some gay and lesbian athletes bringing home the gold or silver or bronze, which, I think, would go a long way in rejecting the kind of attitudes that we're seeing there. And if Russia doesn't have gay or lesbian athletes, then it's probably making their team weaker.

*Russia-U.S. Relations/Former National Security Agency Contractor Edward J. Snowden*

*Q.* Are there going to be any additional punitive measures for Russia, beyond canceling the summit?

*The President.* Keep in mind that our decision to not participate in the summit was not simply around Mr. Snowden. It had to do with the fact that, frankly, on a whole range of issues where we think we can make some progress, Russia has not moved. And so we don't consider that strictly punitive.

We're going to assess where the relationship can advance U.S. interests and increase peace and stability and prosperity around the world. Where it can, we're going to keep on working

with them. Where we have differences, we're going to say so clearly. And my hope is, is that over time, Mr. Putin and Russia recognize that rather than a zero-sum competition, in fact, if the two countries are working together, we can probably advance the betterment of both peoples.

Chuck Todd [NBC News].

*President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia/Former National Security Agency Contractor Edward J. Snowden*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. Given that you just announced a whole bunch of reforms based on, essentially, the leaks that Edward Snowden made on all of these surveillance programs, is that change—is your mindset changed about him? Is he now more a whistleblower than he is a hacker, as you called him at one point or somebody that shouldn't be filed charges? And should he be provided more protection? Is he a patriot? You just used those words. And then just to follow up on the personal—I want to follow up on a personal—

*The President.* Okay, I want to make sure everybody is asking one question; it would be helpful.

Q. No, I understand. It was a part of a question that you didn't answer. Can you get stuff done with Russia, big stuff done, without having a good personal relationship with Putin?

*The President.* I don't have a bad personal relationship with Putin. When we have conversations, they're candid, they're blunt; oftentimes, they're constructive. I know the press likes to focus on body language, and he's got that kind of slouch, looking like the bored kid in the back of the classroom. But the truth is, is that when we're in conversations together, oftentimes, it's very productive.

So the issue here really has to do with where do they want to take Russia; it's substantive on a policy front. And—

Q. [Inaudible]

*The President.* No. Right now this is just a matter of where Mr. Putin and the Russian people want to go. I think if they are looking forward into the 21st century and how they can advance their economy and make sure that

some of our joint concerns around counterterrorism are managed effectively, then I think we can work together. If issues are framed as if U.S. is for it, then Russia should be against it, or we're going to be finding ways where we can poke each other at every opportunity, then probably, we don't get as much stuff done.

See, now I've forgotten your first question, which presumably was the more important one. No, I don't think Mr. Snowden was a patriot. As I said in my opening remarks, I called for a thorough review of our surveillance operations before Mr. Snowden made these leaks.

My preference—and I think the American people's preference—would have been for a lawful, orderly examination of these laws, a thoughtful, fact-based debate that would then lead us to a better place. Because I never made claims that all the surveillance technologies that have developed since the time some of these laws had been put in place somehow didn't require potentially some additional reforms. That's exactly what I called for.

So the fact is, is that Mr. Snowden's been charged with three felonies. If in fact he believes that what he did was right, then, like every American citizen, he can come here, appear before the court with a lawyer, and make his case. If the concern was that somehow this was the only way to get this information out to the public, I signed an Executive order well before Mr. Snowden leaked this information that provided whistleblower protection to the intelligence community for the first time. So there were other avenues available for somebody whose conscience was stirred and thought that they needed to question Government actions.

But having said that, once the leaks have happened, what we've seen is, information come out in dribs and in drabs, sometimes coming out sideways. Once the information is out, the administration comes in, tries to correct the record. But by that time, it's too late or we've moved on, and a general impression has, I think, taken hold not only among the American public, but also around the world that somehow we're out there willy-nilly just

sucking in information on everybody and doing what we please with it.

Now, that's not the case. Our laws specifically prohibit us from surveilling U.S. persons without a warrant. And there are a whole range of safeguards that have been put in place to make sure that that basic principle is abided by.

But what is clear is that whether because of the instinctive bias of the intelligence community to keep everything very close—and probably, what's a fair criticism is my assumption that if we had checks and balances from the courts and Congress, that that traditional system of checks and balances would be enough to give people assurance that these programs were run properly, that assumption, I think, proved to be undermined by what happened after the leaks. I think people have questions about this program.

And so, as a consequence, I think it is important for us to go ahead and answer these questions. What I'm going to be pushing the IC to do is rather than have a trunk come out here and leg come out there and a tail come out there, let's just put the whole elephant out there so people know exactly what they're looking at. Let's examine what is working, what's not, are there additional protections that can be put in place, and let's move forward.

And there's no doubt that Mr. Snowden's leaks triggered a much more rapid and passionate response than would have been the case if I had simply appointed this review board to go through, and I had sat down with Congress, and we had worked this thing through. It would have been less exciting. It would not have generated as much press. I actually think we would have gotten to the same place, and we would have done so without putting at risk our national security and some very vital ways that we are able to get intelligence that we need to secure the country.

Major Garrett [CBS News].

*Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. I'd like to ask you about this debate that's playing itself out in editorial pages, in the blogosphere, even in the Senate Democratic caucus, about the choice you eventually will make of the next Federal Reserve Chairman. There is a perception among Democrats that Larry Summers has the inside track, and perhaps you've made some assurances to him about that. Janet Yellen is the Vice Chair of the Federal Reserve. There are many women in the Senate who are Democrats who believe that breaking the glass ceiling there would be historic and important.

*The President.* Right.

Q. Are you annoyed by this sort of roiling debate? Do you find it any way unseemly? And do you believe this will be one of the most important—if not the most important—economic decisions you'll make in the remainder of your Presidency?

*The President.* It is definitely one of the most important economic decisions that I'll make in the remainder of my Presidency. The Federal Reserve Chairman is not just one of the most important economic policymakers in America, it's—he or she is one of the most important policymakers in the world. And that person presumably will stay on after I'm President. So this, along with Supreme Court appointments, is probably as important a decision as I make as President.

I have a range of outstanding candidates. You've mentioned two of them: Mr. Summers and Mr. Yellen—Ms. Yellen. And they're both terrific people.

I think the perception that Mr. Summers might have an inside track simply had to do with a bunch of attacks that I was hearing on Mr. Summers preemptively, which is sort of a standard Washington exercise that I don't like. Because when somebody has worked hard for me and worked hard on behalf of the American people, and I know the quality of those people, and I see them getting slapped around in the press for no reason—before they've even been nominated for anything—then I want to make

sure that somebody is standing up for them. I felt the same way when people were attacking Susan Rice before she was nominated for anything. So I tend to defend folks who I think have done a good job and don't deserve attacks.

But I consider them both outstanding candidates. My main criteria—I've stated this before, but I want to repeat it—my main criteria for the Fed Reserve Chairman is somebody who understands they've got a dual mandate. A critical part of the job is making sure that we keep inflation in check, that our monetary policy is sound, that the dollar is sound. Those are all critical components of the job. And we've seen what happens when the Fed's not paying attention. We saw, prior to Paul Volcker coming into place, inflation shooting up in ways that really damaged the real economy.

But the other mandate is full employment. And right now, if you look at the biggest challenges we have, the challenge is not inflation; the challenge is, we've still got too many people out of work, too many long-term unemployed, too much slack in the economy, and we're not growing as fast as we should. And so I want a Fed Chairman who's able to look at those issues and have a perspective that keeps an eye on inflation, makes sure that we're not seeing artificial bubbles in place, but also recognizes, you know what, a big part of my job right now is to make sure the economy is growing quickly and robustly and is sustained and durable so that people who work hard in this country are able to find a job.

And I—frankly, I think both Larry Summers and Janet Yellen are highly qualified candidates. There are a couple of other candidates who are highly qualified as well. I'll make the decision in the fall.

Q. Can you see how the perception of you defending Larry Summers as vigorously as you just did and in other quarters leads some to believe you've already made up your mind?

*The President.* Well, except I just told you I haven't. So, Major, I'd defend you if somebody was saying something that wasn't true about you. [Laughter] I really would. In fact, I've

done that in the White House sometimes. [Laughter]

Carol Lee [Wall Street Journal]. And, Carol, congratulations on Hudson.

Q. Oh, thank you, Mr. President.

*The President.* Do you have pictures?

Q. I do. I'll have to show you those. Yes.

*The President.* Okay, I'm going to have to see them. All right.

#### *National Security Agency's Electronic Surveillance Program*

Q. I appreciate you making it a slow news week. [Laughter]

I wanted to ask you about your evolution on the surveillance issues. I mean, part of what you're talking about today is restoring the public trust. And the public has seen you evolve from when you were in the U.S. Senate to now. And even as recently as June, you said that these—the process was such that people should be comfortable with it, and now you're saying you're making these reforms and people should be comfortable with those. So why should the public trust you on this issue? And why did you change your position multiple times?

*The President.* Well, I think it's important to say, Carol, first of all, I haven't evolved in my assessment of the actual programs. I consistently have said that when I came into office, I evaluated them. Some of these programs I had been critical of when I was in the Senate. When I looked through specifically what was being done, my determination was that the two programs in particular that had been at issue, 215 and 702, offered valuable intelligence that helps us protect the American people, and they're worth preserving. What we also saw was that some bolts needed to be tightened up on some of the programs, so we initiated some additional oversight, reforms, compliance officers, audits, and so forth.

And if you look at the reports—even the disclosures that Mr. Snowden has put forward—all the stories that have been written, what you're not reading about is the Government actually abusing these programs and listening in on people's phone calls or inappropriately

reading people's e-mails. What you're hearing about is the prospect that these could be abused. Now, part of the reason they're not abused is because these checks are in place and those abuses would be against the law and would be against the orders of the FISC.

Having said that, though, if you are outside of the intelligence community, if you are the ordinary person and you start seeing a bunch of headlines saying, U.S.—Big Brother looking down on you, collecting telephone records, et cetera, well, understandably, people would be concerned. I would be too if I wasn't inside the Government.

And so in light of the changed environment where a whole set of questions have been raised, some in the most sensationalized manner possible, where these leaks are released, drip by drip, one a week, to kind of maximize attention and see if they can catch us at some imprecision on something; in light of that, it makes sense for us to go ahead, lay out what exactly we're doing, have a discussion with Congress, have a discussion with industry—which is also impacted by this—have a discussion with civil libertarians and see, can we do this better?

I think the main thing I want to emphasize is, I don't have an interest and the people at the NSA don't have an interest in doing anything other than making sure that where we can prevent a terrorist attack, where we can get information ahead of time, that we're able to carry out that critical task. We do not have an interest in doing anything other than that. And we've tried to set up a system that is as failsafe as so far at least we've been able to think of to make sure that these programs are not abused.

But people may have better ideas, and people may want to jigger slightly, sort of, the balance between the information that we can get versus the incremental encroachments on privacy that, if haven't already taken place, might take place in a future administration or as technologies develop further.

And the other thing that's happening is, is that as technology develops further, technology itself may provide us some additional safeguards. So, for example, if people don't have

confidence that the law, the checks and balances of the court and Congress, are sufficient to give us confidence that Government's not snooping, well, maybe we can embed technologies in there that prevent the snooping regardless of what Government wants to do. I mean, there may be some technological fixes that provide another layer of assurance.

And so those are the kinds of things that I'm looking forward to having a conversation about.

Q. Can you understand, though, why some people might not trust what you're saying right now about wanting to—[inaudible].

*The President.* No, I can't.

Q. —that they should be comfortable with the process?

*The President.* Well, the fact that I said that the programs are operating in a way that prevents abuse, that continues to be true, without the reforms. The question is, how do I make the American people more comfortable? All right?

If I tell Michelle that I did the dishes—now, granted, in the White House, I don't do the dishes that much—[laughter]—but back in the day—and she's a little skeptical, well, I'd like her to trust me, but maybe I need to bring her back and show her the dishes and not just have her take my word for it.

And so the program is—I am comfortable that the program currently is not being abused. I'm comfortable that if the American people examined exactly what was taking place, how it was being used, what the safeguards were, that they would say, you know what, these folks are following the law and doing what they say they're doing.

But it is absolutely true that with the expansion of technology—this is an area that's moving very quickly—with the revelations that have depleted public trust, that if there are some additional things that we can do to build that trust back up, then we should do them.

Jonathan Karl [ABC News].

*Al Qaida Terrorist Organization*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You have said that core Al Qaida has been decimated, that its

leaders are on the run. Now that we've seen this terror threat that has resulted in Embassies closed throughout the Arab world, much of Africa, do you still believe that Al Qaida has been decimated? And if I can ask in the interest of transparency, can you tell us about these drone strikes that we've seen over the last couple of weeks in Yemen?

*The President.* What I said in the same National Defense University speech back in May that I referred to earlier is that core Al Qaida is on its heels, has been decimated. But what I also said was that Al Qaida and other extremists have metastasized into regional groups that can pose significant dangers.

And I'd refer you back to that speech just back in May, where I said specifically that although they are less likely to be able to carry out spectacular homeland attacks like 9/11, they have the capacity to go after our Embassies. They have the capacity, potentially, to go after our businesses. They have the capacity to be destabilizing and disruptive in countries where the security apparatus is weak. And that's exactly what we are seeing right now.

So it's entirely consistent to say that this tightly organized and relatively centralized Al Qaida that attacked us on 9/11 has been broken apart and is very weak and does not have a lot of operational capacity and to say we still have these regional organizations like AQAP that can pose a threat, that can drive potentially a truck bomb into an Embassy wall and can kill some people.

And so that requires us then to make sure that we have a strategy that is strengthening those partners so that they've got their own capacity to deal with what are potentially manageable regional threats if these countries are a little bit stronger and have more effective CT and so forth. It means that we've got to continue to be vigilant and go after known terrorists who are potentially carrying out plots or are going to strengthen their capacity over time, because they're always testing the boundaries of, well, maybe we can try this, maybe we can do that.

But this is an ongoing process. We are not going to completely eliminate terrorism. What

we can do is to weaken it and to strengthen our partnerships in such a way that it does not pose the kind of horrible threat that we saw on 9/11.

And I'm not going to discuss specific operations that have taken place. Again, in my speech in May, I was very specific about how we make these determinations about potential lethal strikes, so I would refer you to that speech.

*Q.* So you won't even confirm that we carried out drone strikes in Yemen?

*The President.* I will not have a discussion about operational issues.

Ed Henry [Fox News].

*Q.* I hope you would defend me as well.

*The President.* I would.

*2012 Attack on the U.S. Mission in Benghazi, Libya/Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*

*Q.* Okay, thank you. I want to ask you about two important dates that are coming up. October 1, you've got to implement your signature health care law. You recently decided on your own to delay a key part of that. And I wonder, if you pick and choose what parts of the law to implement, couldn't your successor down the road pick and choose whether they'll implement your law and keep it in place?

And on September 11, we'll have the first anniversary of Benghazi. And you said on September 12, "Make no mistake, we'll bring to justice the killers who attacked our people."

*The President.* Yes.

*Q.* Eleven months later, where are they, sir?

*The President.* Well, I also said that we'd get bin Laden, and I didn't get him in 11 months. So we have informed, I think, the public that there's a sealed indictment. It's sealed for a reason. But we are intent on capturing those who carried out this attack, and we're going to stay on it until we get them.

*Q.* And you're close to having suspects in custody?

*The President.* I will leave it at that. But this remains a top priority for us. Anybody who attacks Americans, anybody who kills, tragically, four Americans who were serving us in a very dangerous place, we're going to do everything

we can to get those who carried out those attacks.

With respect to health care, I didn't simply choose to delay this on my own. This was in consultation with businesses all across the country, many of whom are supportive of the Affordable Care Act, but—and who—many of whom, by the way, are already providing health insurance to their employees but were concerned about the operational details of changing their HR operations, if they've got a lot of employees, which could be costly for them, and them suggesting that there may be easier ways to do this.

Now, what's true, Ed, is, is that in a normal political environment, it would have been easier for me to simply call up the Speaker and say, you know what, this is a tweak that doesn't go to the essence of the law—it has to do with, for example, are we able to simplify the attestation of employers as to whether they're already providing health insurance or not—it looks like there may be some better ways to do this; let's make a technical change to the law. That would be the normal thing that I would prefer to do.

But we're not in a normal atmosphere around here when it comes to, quote, unquote, "Obamacare." We did have the executive authority to do so, and we did so. But this doesn't go to the core of implementation. Let me tell you what is the core of implementation that's already taken place. As we speak, right now, for the 85 percent of Americans who already have health insurance, they are benefiting from being able to keep their kid on their plan if their kid is 26 or younger. That's benefiting millions of young people around the country, which is why lack of insurance among young people has actually gone down. That's in large part attributable to the steps that we've taken.

You've got millions of people who have received rebates, because part of the Affordable Care Act was to say that if insurance company isn't spending 80 percent of your premium on your health care, you get some money back. And lo and behold, people have been getting their money back. It means that folks who have been bumping up with lifetime limits on their

insurance, that it leaves them vulnerable. That doesn't exist.

Seniors have been getting discounts on their prescription drugs. That's happening right now. Free preventive care: mammograms, contraception. That's happening right now. I met a young man today on a bill signing I was doing with the student loan bill who came up to me and said thank you—he couldn't have been more than 25, 26 years old—thank you; I have cancer, thanks to the Affordable Care Act, working with the California program, I was able to get health care, and I'm now in remission. And so right now people are already benefiting.

Now, what happens on October 1, in 53 days, is for the remaining 15 percent of the population that doesn't have health insurance, they're going to be able to go on a website or call up a call center and sign up for affordable, quality health insurance at a significantly cheaper rate than what they can get right now on the individual market. And if even with lower premiums they still can't afford it, we're going to be able to provide them with a tax credit to help them buy it. And between October 1, into March, there will be an open enrollment period in which millions of Americans for the first time are going to be able to get affordable health care.

Now, I think the really interesting question is, why it is that my friends in the other party have made the idea of preventing these people from getting health care their holy grail, their number-one priority? The one unifying principle in the Republican Party at the moment is making sure that 30 million people don't have health care and, presumably, repealing all those benefits I just mentioned: kids staying on their parent's plan; seniors getting discounts on their prescription drugs; I guess a return to lifetime limits on insurance; people with pre-existing conditions continuing to be blocked from being able to get health insurance.

That's hard to understand as an agenda that is going to strengthen our middle class. At least they used to say, well, we're going to replace it with something better. There's not even a pre-

tense now that they're going to replace it with something better.

Q. So it sounds like——

*The President.* The notion is simply that those 30 million people, or the 150 million who are benefiting from the other aspects of Affordable Care, will be better off without it. That's their assertion, not backed by fact, not backed by any evidence. It's just become an ideological fixation.

Well, I tell you what: They're wrong about that. There is no doubt that in implementing the Affordable Care Act, a program of this significance, there are going to be some glitches. No doubt about it. There are going to be things where we say, you know what, we should have thought of that earlier. Or this would work a little bit better. Or this needs an adjustment. That was true of Social Security. That was true of Medicare. That was true of the Children's Health Insurance Program. That was true of the prescription drug program, Part D, that was rolled out by a Republican President and supported by Republicans who are still in the House of Representatives. That's true, by the way, of a car company rolling out a new car. It's true of Apple rolling out the new iPad.

So you will be able to, whenever you want during the course of the next 6 months and probably the next year, find occasions where you say: "Aha, you know what, that could have been done a little bit better." Or, "That thing, they're kind of making an administrative change; that's not how it was originally thought this thing was going to work." Yes, exactly. Because our goal is to actually deliver high-quality, affordable health care for people and to reform the system so costs start going down and people getting—start getting a better bang for the buck. And I make no apologies for that.

And let me just make one last point about this. The idea that you would shut down the Government unless you prevent 30 million people from getting health care is a bad idea. What you should be thinking about is, how can we advance and improve ways for middle class families to have some security so that if they work hard, they can get ahead, and their kids can get ahead.

Jessica Yellin [CNN].

*Federal Government Shutdown/Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. And following on what you just said, Republicans in the House might give you that choice soon to either allow the Government to shut down or see Obamacare defunded. Would you choose to let the Government shut down to ensure that Obamacare remains funded?

*The President.* Well, I'm not going to engage in hypotheticals. I can tell you that the American people would have difficulty understanding why we would weaken our economy, shut down our Government, shut down vital services, have people who are not getting paid who then can't go to restaurants or shop for clothes or all the other things that we're doing here, because Republicans have determined that they don't want to see these folks get health care.

Again, they used to say they had a replacement. That never actually arrived, right? I mean, I've been hearing about this whole replace thing for 2 years; now I just don't hear about it, because basically, they don't have an agenda to provide health insurance to people at affordable rates. And the idea that you would shut down the Government at a time when the recovery is getting some traction; where we're growing, although not as fast as we need to; where the housing market is recovering, although not as fast as we would like; that we would precipitate another crisis here in Washington that no economist thinks is a good idea—I'm assuming that they will not take that path. I have confidence that common sense, in the end, will prevail.

Q. And if they do, sir, you will have to make that choice?

*The President.* We'll see what happens. We've got a couple of months.

*Federal Budget*

Q. When's the last time you spoke to Speaker Boehner about the budget?

*The President.* Fairly recently, yes. Probably right before they left.

Okay. Scott Horsley [NPR].

### *Immigration Reform*

*Q.* Thank you, Mr. President. Part of the political logic behind immigration reform was the strong showing by Latino voters last November.

*The President.* Yes.

*Q.* That doesn't seem to resonate with a lot of House Republicans who represent overwhelmingly White districts. What other political leverage can you bring to bear to help move a bill in the House?

*The President.* Well, we've got an economic report that shows that our economy would be a trillion dollars stronger if we get immigration reform done. We've got evidence that our housing market would be stronger if immigrants are in a situation in which, having paid a fine, having paid back taxes, that they now have the ability to actually enter into the housing market. We've got strong evidence that our technological and research edge would be better if we get immigration reform done.

We know that the Senate bill strengthens border security, puts unprecedented resources on top of the unprecedented resources I've already put into border security. So if your main priority is border security, I'd think you'd want to vote for this bill. We know that the Senate bill creates a system in which employers are held accountable for when they hire undocumented workers. This is something that people say is a bad thing. I agree. Let's make sure that that system for holding employers accountable is in place.

So when I hear the opposition to immigration reform, I just run through the list of things they're concerned about, I look at what the Senate bill does, and I say to myself, you know what, the Senate bill actually improves the situation on every issue that they say they're concerned about.

Now, what they may argue is, it doesn't solve the problem a hundred percent. I don't know a law that solves a problem a hundred percent. Social Security lifted millions of se-

niors out of poverty, but there are still some poor seniors. The Civil Rights Act and the Voting Rights Act drastically reduced discrimination in America, but there's still discrimination. That doesn't make them bad laws; it just means that there are very few human problems that are a hundred percent solvable.

So what I see right now is a strong bipartisan vote coming out of the Senate. I think that the Speaker and others have said they need to do something, and I'd urge, when they get back, to do something. Put forward a bill that has an opportunity to actually pass. It may not be precisely what's in the Senate bill. My preference would be for them to go ahead and call the Senate bill. But if they've got some additional ideas, I think the Senate is happy to consider them. And get that bill on the floor, put it up for a vote.

I am absolutely certain that the votes for the Senate bill, which strengthens border security, demands responsibility from undocumented workers to pay a fine—pay a penalty and get to the back of the line, reforms our legal immigration system, holds employers accountable, I am absolutely confident that if that bill was on the floor of the House, it would pass.

So the challenge right now is not that there aren't a majority of House Members, just like a majority of Senate Members, who aren't prepared to support this bill. The problem is internal Republican caucus politics. And that's what the American people don't want us to be worrying about. Don't worry about your Washington politics, solve problems.

And this is one where you've actually got some pretty broad consensus. I don't know an issue where you've got labor, the Chamber of Commerce, evangelicals, student groups, you name it, supportive of a bill. Let's get it done, all right?

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 3:09 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to former National Economic Council Director Lawrence H. Summers; National Security Adviser Susan E. Rice, in her former capacity

as U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations; Hudson A. Lee, son of Wall Street Journal reporter Carol E. Lee; and former President George W. Bush. He also referred to

the Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) terrorist organization. A reporter referred to White House Press Secretary James F. “Jay” Carney.

## The President’s Weekly Address *August 10, 2013*

For the past few weeks, I’ve been visiting folks across America to talk about what we need to do as a country to secure a better bargain for the middle class.

I’ve been laying out my ideas for how we can build on the cornerstones of what it means to be middle class in America: a good job, a good education, affordable health care when you get sick, a secure retirement even if you’re not rich, and the chance to own your own home.

This week, I went to Arizona and California, two of the States hit hardest when the housing bubble burst, triggering the recession. All across the country, millions of responsible Americans were hurt badly by the reckless actions of others: Home values plummeted, construction workers were laid off, and many families lost their homes.

Over the past 4 years, we’ve worked to help millions of responsible homeowners get back on their feet. And while we’re not where we need to be yet, our housing market is beginning to heal. Housing prices and sales are rising. Construction is up. Foreclosures are down. Millions of families have come up for air because they’re no longer underwater on their mortgages.

Now we have to build on this progress. Congress should give every American the chance to refinance at today’s low rates. We should help more qualified families get a mortgage and buy their first home. We should get construction workers back on the job rebuilding communities hit hardest by the crisis. And we should make sure that folks who don’t want to buy a home have a decent, affordable place to rent.

As home prices rise, we have to turn the page on the bubble-and-burst mentality that

created this mess and build a housing system that’s rock solid and rewards responsibility for generations to come. That means winding down the companies known as Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, making sure private capital plays a bigger role in the mortgage market, and ending the era of expecting a bailout after your pursuit of profit puts the whole country at risk. We need to preserve access to safe and simple mortgages like the 30-year, fixed-rate mortgage. We need to keep laying down rules of the road that protect homeowners when they’re making the biggest purchase of their lives. And finally, Congress needs to confirm Mel Watt to be our Nation’s top housing regulator so that he can protect consumers and help responsible lenders provide credit.

No program or policy will solve all the problems of a multitrillion-dollar housing market, and it will take time to fully recover. But if we work together, we can make a home a source of pride and middle class security again. And if Washington is willing to set aside politics and focus on what really matters, we can rebuild an economy where if you work hard, you can get ahead.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 5:35 p.m. on August 9 in the State Dining Room at the White House for broadcast on August 10. In the address, the President referred to Rep. Melvin L. Watt in his capacity as Director-designate of the Federal Housing Finance Agency. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on August 9, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 10.

## Remarks to the Disabled American Veterans National Convention in Orlando, Florida August 10, 2013

Hello, DAV! Thank you so much. Thank you. Everybody, please have a seat. Do we have an extraordinary First Lady? So I—we will be celebrating our 21st anniversary in October. The first time I saw her, I knew she was something special. [Laughter] She was a little more skeptical about me. [Laughter] But persistence is the key. You just got to stay on it. Eventually, you can marry up. [Laughter]

To Michelle and Jill Biden and Joining Forces, we are so proud of the work you've done to help rally America around military families and veterans. I'm inspired by what they are doing. So thank you, Michelle, for your extraordinary work.

DAV, I was proud to join at your convention 3 years ago. It is wonderful to be back. I want to thank your national commander. Larry Polzin, thank you so much to the entire leadership team, Joe Johnston, Marc Burgess, Donna Adams; all the incredible spouses and families of the DAV Auxiliary. I want to thank Barry Jenichoski—Jesinoski. [Laughter] I've got it. [Laughter] They used to mispronounce Obama too. [Laughter] I want to thank Barry and your great team in Washington.

Disabled American Veterans, like all veterans, you carry in your hearts the story of brave service that took you to every corner of the Earth. As young men and women, you left home, left everything and everyone you ever knew because storm clouds gathered far across the sea. You had your whole lives ahead of you, but you were willing to risk all of it for this land that we love. Because you know, from hard experience, what we must never forget: Our country endures because in every generation there are Americans like you who stand beside her and guide her and protect her.

You fought across the Pacific, island by island. You fought into the heart of Europe, mile by mile, freeing millions from fascism. That's your legacy as veterans of the Second World War. You held the line at the Pusan Perimeter and survived the bitter cold of the Chosin Res-

ervoir. And on this 60th anniversary of the end of that war, we salute all of our veterans of the Korean war.

To our Vietnam veterans, you served with valor not just in the thick of the jungle, but through intense urban combat. And let it be remembered that you won every major battle that you fought in. And so in the decades since, whenever our country has needed you, you said, "Send me"—from the sands of Desert Storm to the mountains of the Balkans to the villages of Afghanistan and Iraq. And next year, your profound sacrifice will be recognized in the heart of our Nation's Capital when our country dedicates the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial.

That memorial will honor your courage in war. But it will also pay tribute to your bravery in the other battle you have fought: the fight to recover from the wounds of war. And this may be your greatest triumph of all. Because rather than being defined by what you lost, by what you can't do, you've inspired America with what you can do.

And maybe you lost your sight, but you can still see the truth that our disabled veterans make extraordinary contributions to our country every single day. Maybe you lost an arm, but you still have the strength to pick up a friend or neighbor in need. Maybe you lost a leg, but you still stand tall for the values and freedoms that make America the greatest Nation on Earth.

I think of the wounded warrior who spoke for so many of you when he said, "Your life will never be the same, but that doesn't mean you can't go on to do amazing things with the second chance you were given." I think of wounded warriors across America and how they've used that second chance: volunteering in communities; building homes; being a mentor to local kids; showing up after tornadoes, after Hurricane Sandy, to help folks rebuild. I think of the wounded warriors who reached out to the survivors of the Boston Marathon bombing

with the example of their own recovery and with a simple message: “We stand with you.”

I think of all the inspiring wounded warriors that Michelle and I have met: their resilience, their resolve, their determination to push through and to carry on. That’s the fighting spirit of our wounded warriors. That’s the spirit of DAV, dedicated not just to your own recovery, but to taking care of each other. Every day, you work to ensure that America is fulfilling its promises to our men and women who have served. That’s your mission. And I want you to know it is my mission too.

I believe that this work is more important than ever, because this time of war that we’ve been in is coming to an end. For nearly 12 years—ever since we were attacked on that clear September morning—our Nation has been at war. Our fight in Afghanistan is now America’s longest war. At the same time, our troops fought courageously in Iraq for 9 long years. And among us today are proud veterans of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Now we’ve marked another milestone in Afghanistan: As of this past June, Afghan forces have taken the lead for security across their entire country. So instead of leading the fight, our troops now have a different mission: supporting Afghan forces. Our war in Afghanistan has entered the final chapter. More of our troops are coming home. This winter, we’ll be down to 34,000. By the end of next year, the transition will be complete. Afghans will take full responsibility for their security, and our war in Afghanistan will be over.

For this progress, we thank all who have served in Afghanistan, including DAV members here today. Just a few I want to mention. We salute folks like Timothy Duke. Where’s Timothy? Right here. In the early days of the war, Timothy’s helicopter unit served in some of the most remote parts of Afghanistan. On another tour, in Iraq, his convoy was hit by an IED. He endured three spinal surgeries. Then he went to school on the post-9/11 GI bill. Today, he is helping at the DAV, helping veterans and their families access their benefits. That’s

the kind of spirit the DAV represents. Thank you, Timothy, for your outstanding service and work.

We salute Staff Sergeant Jacare Hogan. Where’s Jacare? In Iraq, she was hit by IEDs three times. She’s endured surgeries, rehab—which continue to this day—but she refused to stop serving. She deployed again to Afghanistan. As a logistics specialist, she served at forward operating bases, keeping them running, flying between bases, getting shot at along the way. At those remote outposts, she was often the only woman on base. She proudly wears the Combat Action Badge. But her service hasn’t stopped. So here at DAV, she counsels others as they recover. “Helping [the] troops is what I’m about.” That’s what she says. And we are grateful to you, Jacare, for your extraordinary service.

And we salute Jason Hassinger. Where is Jason? Right here. When Jason’s unit was ambushed and pinned down, he was hit five times in the chest. But he pushed on, helped lead his men to safety, for which he earned the Silver Star. After months of care and rehab, he returned to his unit: going out on patrol, gritting his teeth through the pain in his chest. And today, at DAV, Jason helps his fellow vets access the benefits that they have earned. It is “my job” to “help people heal.” That’s what Jason says. Thank you.

So Timothy, Jacare, Jason, they’re just examples of all who have served in these years of war, the 9/11 generation. And now you’re beginning the next chapter in your lives wearing a proud new title: veteran of the United States Armed Forces. So this time of war may be coming to an end, but the job of caring for our veterans goes on, and our work caring for our newest veterans has only just begun.

I mean, think about it: We lost the last veteran of the First World War 2 years ago, but we still care for the children of our World War I veterans. To this day, we still help care for children of men who fought in the Spanish-American War, even the daughter of a Civil War veteran. So when we talk about fulfilling our

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<sup>o</sup> White House correction.

promises to all who serve, we're not just talking about a few years, we're talking about decades, for as long as you and your families walk this Earth.

With a new generation joining your ranks, I believe that now is the time to make sure our Nation is truly ready: organized and structured to get this right: not just for this year, not just for next year, but for decades to come; not just for the veterans of today's wars, but for all wars. And I believe we need to focus on five key priorities.

Number one, we need to make sure we've got the resources, the budgets our veterans deserve. Since I took office, we've made historic investments in our veterans. Even in these tough fiscal times, we've boosted the VA budget by more than 40 percent. We now budget for veterans health care a year in advance. And I've proposed a further increase in veterans funding for next year.

Now, some of you may be aware, right now we've got these reckless, across-the-board budget cuts called the sequester that's hitting a lot of folks hard. And it's cost jobs. It's hurting our military, slashing investments in education and science and medical research. I made it clear that your veterans benefits are exempt from this year's sequester. I've made that clear. But I want to tell you: Going forward, the best way to protect the VA care you have earned is to get rid of this sequester altogether. Congress needs to come together and agree on a responsible plan that reduces our deficits and keeps our promises to our veterans and keeps our promises to future generations. That's what I'm fighting for. That's what you deserve.

Number two, we need to make sure you're getting the veterans health care you've been promised. We're already making record investments: more outreach, more clinics, more service. For our Vietnam vets, we made sure that you and your families finally got the disability pay you deserve because of your exposure to agent orange. For our Desert Storm veterans, we made it easier for you to get the care you need for illnesses connected to your service. For our veterans with PTSD, we made it easier

for you to get the VA care you need as well, regardless of the war that you served in.

For our women's veterans—and there are more of you than ever—we're offering more tailored care, more clinics just for women, more clinicians trained to treat you with respect and dignity. So all told, we've made VA health care available to more than 2 million veterans who didn't have it before.

I've proposed more funding for prosthetics for our disabled vets to help you work and walk and run again. And for you—the caregivers and families—we're going to keep empowering you with the skills and support you need as you care for the veterans that you love.

We also need to keep improving mental health services, because we've got to end this epidemic of suicide among our veterans and troops. Last year, I said this had to be an all-hands-on-deck approach, not just at DOD and the VA, but across our Government. I issued an Executive order to step up our game, and we have—hiring more counselors, hiring more mental health providers, new awareness campaigns—so that those who are hurting know that asking for help is not a sign of weakness, it's a part of staying strong, it's a part of getting back up. Hundreds of medical and nursing schools have committed to improving research and care for our veterans and their families. And I've proposed more funding for mental health. We can't just promise better care, we've actually got to deliver better care.

So today I'm proud to announce the next step in this fight. We're unveiling a new national action plan to guide mental health research across government, industry, and academia, so that we're going to focus on developing more effective ways to prevent, diagnose, and treat mental health conditions like TBI and PTSD. And to get it done, we're moving ahead with more than \$100 million in new research. So I'm not going to be satisfied until every veteran and every man and woman in uniform gets the support and the help they need to stay strong.

Now, on the subject of veterans health care, you may have noticed there's still a lot of misinformation out there about the new health care law, Affordable Care Act. Some folks are

out there trying to scare people, including veterans. So let me say this as plainly as I can. If you already have health insurance or health care from the VA, you do not have to do a thing. Your VA health care does not change. It is safe. There are no new fees. Don't let them hoodwink you.

But the good news is, if you're among one of the more than 1 million veterans who don't have health insurance, starting October 1, you'll have a new option. Online marketplaces will let you shop and compare and buy private health insurance plans, just like you can go online to compare prices when you buy a TV or airplane ticket or a car. And because of the Affordable Care Act, insurance companies will no longer be able to discriminate against you or deny you coverage because of preexisting conditions like PTSD. So you'll have more security in being able to get health insurance. So don't let them fool you. No one is taking away your benefits. Your veterans health care is safe. We're not reducing veterans access to health care, we're expanding it. That's the truth.

And that leads me to the third priority we've got to focus on. We've got to attack this claims backlog. Now, the last time I was with you, I pledged to cut the backlog, slash those wait times, deliver your benefits sooner. And I'm going to be honest with you: It has not moved as fast as I wanted. Part of it is all these new veterans in the system who came in: agent orange, PTSD. It means a lot more claims, and despite additional resources, it's resulted in longer waits. And that's been unacceptable: unacceptable to me, unacceptable to Secretary Shinseki.

So we put more of our VA folks to work as claims processors, we hired more claims processors as well. We've got them working overtime, completing more than a million claims a year. We prioritized the oldest claims. Veterans groups like the DAV have pitched in as well, helping vets with their claims, getting them ready so when they bring them, they're in better shape, and they can move a little quicker. And today I can report that we are not where we need to be, but we're making progress. [Applause] We are making progress. So

after years when the backlog kept growing, finally the backlog is shrinking. In the last 5 months alone, it's down nearly 20 percent. We're turning the tide.

And we're not going to let up until we eliminate the backlog once and for all. And we'll keep moving ahead with paperless systems so the backlog doesn't come back and so your claims are processed right the first time, on time. After years of military service, you shouldn't have to wait for years for the benefits you have earned.

Fourth, just like you fought to defend our rights and freedoms, we need to uphold the dignity and rights of every veteran. And that starts by keeping up our campaign to end homelessness among veterans. We're not just bringing our veterans off the streets, we're doing more to reach at-risk and low-income vets so they don't become homeless in the first place. And we're not going to rest until every veteran who has fought for America has a home in America.

Yesterday I was proud to sign into law the Helping Heroes Fly Act, to end those intrusive airport screenings so you—our wounded warriors and disabled vets, especially those of you with prosthetics—can travel with dignity. And I know how disappointing it was last year when the Senate failed to approve the Disabilities Treaty despite the fact that we had a former Senator and World War II veteran, Bob Dole, in the Senate Chamber. But we're going to keep fighting to ratify that treaty, because the United States has always been a leader for the rights of the disabled. We believe that disabled Americans like you deserve the same opportunities to work and to study and to travel in other countries as any other American. It's the right thing to do. We need to get it done.

Which brings me to the final priority we need to stay focused on, and that's making sure that our veterans have every opportunity to pursue the American Dream, starting with the education and jobs worthy of your extraordinary talents.

With our new transition assistance program, we're doing more to help departing servicemembers and their spouses plan their careers

and find that new job. We're going to keep helping our newest veterans and their families pursue their education under the post-9/11 GI bill. We're building on the Executive order I issued last year to protect you as you go looking for schools. I said we're going to stand up against dishonest recruiting and predatory practices that target our veterans. So we set new standards. And so far, more than 6,000 schools across the country have signed on and pledged to do right by you and your families. We don't want our veterans cheated.

I also said that schools need to step up their support so we're doing more to help our veterans succeed on campus. So today we're announcing what we call 8 Keys to Success, specific steps that schools can take to truly welcome and encourage our veterans. And so far, more than 250 community colleges and universities have signed on, and today I'm calling on schools across America to join us in this effort. Let's help our veterans get that degree, get that credential, and compete for the high-skilled jobs of tomorrow.

Now, I'm also going to make sure that the Federal Government keeps doing its part. I'm very proud of the fact that, since I took office, Federal departments and agencies have hired nearly 300,000 veterans, including many disabled veterans. And I'm going to keep calling on Congress to pass the veterans job corps to put our veterans to work protecting and rebuilding America.

And we're also doing everything we can to help you get those private sector jobs: more help with job searches, more tools like our online jobs bank to connect veterans to jobs that are open right now, making it easier for you to transfer your skills to the licenses and credentials you need for civilian jobs. And because tens of thousands of our veterans have already been helped, Congress needs to make permanent tax credits for companies that hire our veterans and wounded warriors. It's the right thing to do.

And we're going to keep urging companies across America to do the smart thing: hire some of the best workers you'll ever find; hire a vet. Michelle and Jill have done great work on

this. And responding to our challenge, working with Joining Forces, America's businesses have already hired or trained 290,000 veterans and military spouses, and they've committed to hiring over 400,000 more. More companies are signing up all the time. We are going to get companies to understand that you can't get a better deal than hiring a veteran.

Because of all the efforts I've described and because of a growing economy, veterans unemployment is going down, more veterans are finding jobs, and we're going to keep at this. Because with your skills and drive, we don't just want you fighting for America overseas, we want you to be right here, building a stronger America, fighting for a better future for our kids.

So ensuring the resources and budgets you deserve, delivering on the health care that you've earned, making sure you can count on it, continuing to reduce the backlog, standing up for your rights and dignity, creating jobs and opportunities so you can realize your dreams—that's what I'm focused on. That's what I have told my entire administration to be focused on. That's what our country needs to stay focused for the many years to come.

And nobody knows this better than you, our disabled veterans. The road of recovery is often such a long haul. And America needs to be there for you during that long haul. And that's the lesson of the extraordinary young man I told you about when I spoke to you 3 years ago, an Army Ranger, Sergeant First Class Cory Remsburg.

A massive IED in Afghanistan nearly killed him. He was in a coma for months with severe traumatic brain injury. And I told you then how, when I saw him in the hospital, he had come out of the coma, but he still couldn't speak. And when I asked him how he was feeling, he slowly brought his hand up, and he pulled his fingers together, and he gave a thumbs up. His mom was sitting there with him.

A few days ago, I saw Cory and his family again, this time in Phoenix, where they live. So I wanted to give you an update on how he's doing. I won't—I suspect it won't surprise you to know that for Cory, the years since he was in-

jured have been very hard: brain surgeries, half a dozen of them; surgeries to replace part of his skull; eye surgeries; special procedures on his lungs; skin grafts, skin flaps. All told, dozens of surgeries and procedures.

Rehab has been grueling. On a typical day, Cory wakes up and spends hours in therapy: physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy. So progress has come slowly, but it has come. He had to learn the simple things all over again: how to speak, how to write his name, how to throw a ball. And this past spring, he reached another milestone. After years in the hospital and rehab facilities, he finally came home, greeted by hundreds of neighbors and friends waving American flags.

And so when I saw Cory a few days ago, he is still blind in one eye. He still struggles to move his left side. But the young man I had seen in that hospital bed unable to speak, barely able to move, this time he was in a chair sitting up, alert, smiling, talking. And then, he wanted to show me something. And he leaned out of his chair. And he reached out, and he grabbed his walker. And with the help of his parents, he pulled himself forward, and he stood up. And he looked at me, and he gave me a sharp salute. And he said, "Rangers lead the way."

And his stepmom held one arm for balance, and I held the other. And then, Cory took a step, then another, and then another one after that, all the way across the room. Little by little, Cory is learning to walk again. And he's starting to get good on his recumbent bike. He hopes to bike in a race this fall, 42 miles. He's scheduled to move into his own home, adapted to his needs with the help of a caregiver, another step towards the greater independence he seeks. And so Cory says: "My recovery has not been easy. Nothing in

life that's worth anything is easy." But he says, I don't "give up." I don't give up.

The war in Afghanistan may be ending, but for Cory and our disabled vets, the work has only just begun. Cory is 30 years old. His recovery, like so many of yours, will last a lifetime. But he won't give up, because you haven't given up. And when it comes to our work, to making sure that our Nation is fulfilling its promises to the men and women who served and sacrificed, America cannot give up either. I will not give up. We cannot give up.

So long as I'm the United States President, I will make it my mission to make sure that America is right there beside you every step of the way, every step with Cory, every step with the DAV. God bless you. God bless our veterans. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at approximately 12 p.m. in the ballroom of the Hilton Orlando hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Jill T. Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden; Larry A. Polzin, chairman of the board of directors, Joseph W. Johnston, national commander, J. Marc Burgess, secretary of the board of directors, Donna M. Adams, auxiliary national commander, Barry A. Jesinoski, executive director of the Washington, DC, headquarters, and Timothy Duke, national service officer, Disabled American Veterans; S. Sgt. Jacare Hogan, USA; Cpl. Jason M. Hassinger, USMC; Juanita Tudor Lowrey, daughter of Civil War veteran Hugh Tudor; and Karen Petersen, mother, Ken Remsburg, father, and Anne Remsburg, stepmother, of S. Sgt. Cory Remsburg. He also referred to H.R. 1344, which was approved August 9 and assigned Public Law No. 113-27. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of the First Lady.

## Remarks on the Situation in Egypt From Chilmark, Massachusetts *August 15, 2013*

Good morning, everybody. I just finished a discussion with my national security team about the situation in Egypt, and I wanted to provide an update about our response to the events of the last several days.

Let me begin by stepping back for a moment. The relationship between the United States and Egypt goes back decades. It's rooted in our respect of Egypt as a nation, an ancient center of civilization, and a cornerstone