

Remarks at the Department of Housing and Urban Development July 31, 2014

Thank you. Now, let me start off by making two points. The first is, clearly, HUD has the rowdiest employees. I now realize that. The second point is that before I came out here, Shaun Donovan made a point of saying that this wasn't as exciting to people as Michelle coming. *[Laughter]* Now, I know that. *[Laughter]* I hear that everywhere I go. *[Laughter]* There's no reason to remind me, to rub it in. *[Laughter]* That's why I married her. To improve the gene pool. *[Laughter]*

I am here today because I stole one terrific Secretary of HUD from you, but I've delivered another terrific Secretary of HUD to you. And I want to thank all of you for the great job that you're doing day in and day out. And we appreciate the Members of Congress who are here—although I have to say that Joaquin didn't really have a choice. *[Laughter]* The other two, obviously, they care. *[Laughter]* The brother, he's, like, okay, I've got to show up. *[Laughter]* But I appreciate them being here.

Let me just say a few words about Shaun. From his first day when he got here, Shaun knew he had his work cut out for him. You will recall that the housing market was the epicenter of the crisis that went through in 2008, 2009. There were millions of families whose homes were underwater. Hundreds of thousands of construction workers were out of a job. Too many veterans lived out on the street.

But we were very fortunate because Shaun is just one of those people where, he sees a problem, he's going to work to solve it. And if what he tries the first time doesn't work, he's going to try something else. And he's just kind of—he's a geek, he's a wonk. *[Laughter]* He studies the spreadsheets. He recruited top talent. He promised that if everyone here at HUD worked just a little bit harder, you could really turn things around for struggling families. And all of you accepted that challenge.

We've still got work to do, but think about the progress that we've made. Home prices, home sales, construction all up. Veterans' homelessness down by nearly 25 percent. Mil-

lions of families are now seeing their home values above water, which obviously is a huge relief for them. When natural disasters strike, like the Colorado floods or Hurricane Sandy, you are right in there helping families rebuild.

And a lot of that is thanks to Shaun; a lot of it is thanks to the fact that all of you under his leadership took up the challenge and you remembered what it is that this agency is about.

I love the way that your new Secretary characterized it. This is—this should be a department of opportunity. And housing, for so many people, is symbolic of the American Dream. It means that you've got something stable, something you can count on, something that you own. And to watch the transformation that has happened around the country—first and foremost because of the resiliency of the American people and their hard work—but also because that every step of the way you were in there trying to help them—that really makes a difference.

So I could not be prouder of the work that Shaun did. But I can tell you that nobody is more passionate about these issues than Julián. He knows the difference between smart policy and investments that can make a difference and just talk. And he's all about action, not just talk.

He's seen it firsthand in how he grew up. He's seen it firsthand as a mayor. He revitalized parts of San Antonio that had been neglected for a long time. He helped the Eastside Promise Zone take root and to grow. He championed the kind of investments that keep communities strong over the long term, like economic development and expanded early childhood education. And most of all, he knows how to lead a team. And this is a big team, and you guys have gotten some big things done. But we've got a lot more to do. Even bigger things need to get done.

So what—in talking to Julián and initially trying to persuade him to take this task, what I saw was that spirit of hard work that's reflected in how he was brought up and the values that

were instilled in him. And he, every single day, wants to make sure that those values live out in the work that he does.

And I know everybody in this room, you've got a story to tell too about somebody who, along the way, gave you some opportunity; about somebody who—maybe you were, like me, raised by a single mom and—like that first apartment that really—had your own bedroom, and it was clean. [Laughter] And it was in a decent neighborhood and there was a decent school district. And how happy everybody was, and the transformation that could take place in people's lives. That's a story I want you to tap into every day that you come to work.

Sometimes, work in Washington can be discouraging. Sometimes, it seems as if the agenda that you're trying to pursue helping working families and middle class families, sometimes, it seems that's not the priorities up on Capitol Hill. But if you remember why you got into this work in the first place, if you remember that this is not just a job, but it should also be a passion, that it should also be part of giving back, that you shouldn't just be checking in and punching the clock, but every single day, there's somebody out there who could use your help—and I know when they get that help, and they write letters to me, and they'll tell me, you know what, you transformed my life—there's no better feeling on Earth than that feeling that you somehow played a small part in a family succeeding.

And that success then lasts generations, because some child or grandchild suddenly is feeling better, and they start doing better in school, and maybe they avoided getting into trouble and ending up in the criminal justice system or dropping out of school and not being able to find a job—all because of what you did. What an incredible privilege that is. What an incredible honor.

And that's the attitude I want you to have every single day that you're here. I tell folks, I've now been President for more than 5½ years, and I've got 2½ years left, and I want to squeeze every single day—I want to squeeze as much out of every single day. This is not just a job, this is a privilege that we have. And we've

got to do—we've got to take advantage of it. We've got to seize it. Because that's what makes it worthwhile.

It's something that when I travel around the country, I try to describe, because people are so inundated with cynicism and bad news, and I want to tell them a story of good news. There are people in agencies like HUD, every single day, they care about you, and they want to help you. And big organizations are never going to be perfect, and there are always going to be some bureaucracies, there's always going to be some redtape, there's always going to be some things that don't work quite as smoothly as we want. And your job is to fix that stuff or work around that stuff.

And I want everybody here to—when you're working with this new Secretary, who's got energy and drive, he's young, he's good-looking, he talks good—you can't let him down. [Laughter] You've got to be open to try new things and doing things in a different way and doing them better. But more importantly, you can't let those families out there down, because they're counting on you.

So I'm eager to work with him, but more importantly, I'm eager to work with you. And every single day when you come to work, I just want you to know that I can't do my job unless you're doing your job. Julián can't do his job unless you're doing your job. And whether you are managing a financing program to build low-income or affordable housing, or you are helping with some of our initiatives like Promise Zones, or you are coordinating with regional offices—whatever your task, whether you are upper management or you're the new kid on the block who's coming in, you can really have an impact that lasts for generations.

Don't squander that. Don't succumb to the cynicism. Don't start thinking that this is just a job. Remember the mission that you've got. And if you do that, I guarantee you, under Julián's leadership, years from now you're going to be able to look back and really be proud of everything that you've accomplished, because there are going to be a whole lot of people's lives who are a lot better. All right?

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:50 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Shaun L.S. Donovan,

Director, Office of Management and Budget, in his former capacity as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; Secretary of Housing and Urban Development Julián Castro; and Reps. Joaquin Castro, Al Green, and Filemon Vela, Jr.

Remarks at a Dinner Celebrating the 46th Anniversary of the Special Olympics July 31, 2014

The President. Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. Good evening, everybody, and welcome to the White House. Everybody looks wonderful.

This is a truly special evening. And we are delighted to celebrate it with so many people from so many different walks of life. It is not often that you get Dikembe Mutombo, Steve Case, Stevie Wonder all in the same room. [Laughter] In fact, that may be the first time that they were ever in the same sentence.

We have just one of my favorite people performing tonight, Katy Perry. We are so grateful to her. I love Katy Perry. She is just a wonderful person. I've just met her mom, and now I know why she is such a wonderful person. But I just want everybody to know she is on tour right now, and so for her to take time out to do this is really special, and so we really want to say thank you to her for doing this.

The fact that so many accomplished, wonderful people are here is a testament to the impact that the Special Olympics has had on our Nation and has had on our world. This organization has touched so many lives. And tonight Michelle and I are thrilled that we get a chance to say thank you to everyone who's been a part of it.

When Eunice Kennedy Shriver began what would become the Special Olympics in her backyard over 50 years ago, it's not clear whether she could imagine how far and how fast it would end up going. Of course, knowing her, she probably did have a sense of where it was going to go. That's the kind of visionary that she was. I want to recognize all the members of the Shriver family who are here tonight

and who continue to carry on the family's incredible tradition of service. Thanks.

Today, in more than 170 countries, Special Olympians are athletes of all kinds: skiers and speed skaters, sailors, cyclists, equestrians, and judo masters. They make extraordinary contributions to their communities. And I'm proud—proud to highlight a few of them here tonight.

Loretta Claiborne didn't just finish with the top 100 women runners in the Boston Marathon twice; she was also the first Special Olympian to speak to world leaders during the United Nations General Assembly. So we're very proud of Loretta. Where's Loretta—right here. There she is. Yay, Loretta! And by the way, during the receiving line, Loretta and Michelle compared arms. [Laughter]

The First Lady. Hers were better. [Laughter]

The President. Yes, they were. [Laughter]

Tim Harris is a Special Olympian in basketball, poly hockey, volleyball, golf, and track and field. So he has all four seasons covered. [Laughter] Now he has a restaurant in Albuquerque called Tim's Place. The most popular item is the hugs Tim gives his customers, and so far, more than 42,000 have been served. Where's Tim? There he is right there. Yay, Tim! Tim is fired up. Tim is fired up, although, Tim, I didn't get a hug. [Laughter] Come on, man. Oh, here we go. All right, come on. Come on, man.

[At this point, Tim Harris came to the stage and hugged the President.]

Mr. Harris. I love you, Obama.

The President. I love you back.

See, you know, Presidents need some encouragement once in a while too. [Laughter]