

The President's Weekly Address August 16, 2014

Hi, everybody. Over the next couple weeks, schools all across the country will be opening their doors. Students will suit up for fall sports and marching band and the school play; moms and dads will snap those first-day-of-school pictures, and that includes me and Michelle.

And so today I want to talk directly with students and parents about one of the most important things any of you can do this year, and that's to begin preparing yourself for an education beyond high school.

We know that in today's economy, whether you go to a 4-year college, a community college, or a professional training program, some higher education is the surest ticket to the middle class. A typical American with a bachelor's degree or higher earns over \$28,000 more per year than someone with just a high school diploma. And they're also much more likely to have a job in the first place. The unemployment rate for those with a bachelor's degree is less than one-third of the rate for those without a high school diploma.

But for too many families across the country, paying for higher education is a constant struggle. Earlier this year, a young woman named Elizabeth Cooper wrote to tell me how hard it is for middle class families like hers to afford college. As she said, she feels "not significant enough to be addressed, not poor enough for people to worry [about], and not rich enough to be cared about."

Michelle and I know the feeling. We only finished paying off our student loans 10 years ago. And so, as President, I'm working to make sure young people like Elizabeth can go to college without racking up mountains of debt. We reformed a student loan system so that more money goes to students instead of big banks. We expanded grants and college tax credits for students and families. We took action to offer millions of students a chance to cap their student loan payments at 10 percent of their income. And Congress should pass a bill to let students refinance their loans at today's lower

interest rates, just like their parents can refinance their mortgage.

But as long as college costs keep rising, we can't just keep throwing money at the problem. Colleges have to do their part to bring down costs as well. That's why we proposed a plan to tie Federal financial aid to a college's performance and create a new college scorecard so that students and parents can see which schools provide the biggest bang for your buck. We launched a new \$75 million challenge to inspire colleges to reduce costs and raise graduation rates. And in January, more than a hundred college presidents and nonprofit leaders came to the White House and made commitments to increase opportunities for underserved students.

Since then, we've met with even more leaders who want to create new community-based partnerships and support school counselors. And this week, my Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, announced a series of commitments to support students who need a little extra academic help getting through college.

This is a challenge I take personally. And to all you young people, now that you're heading back to school, your education is something you have to take personally also. It's up to you to push yourself, to take hard classes and read challenging books. Science shows that when you struggle to solve a problem or make a new argument, you're actually forming new connections in your brain. So, when you're thinking hard, you're getting smarter, which means this year, challenge yourself to reach higher. And set your sights on college in the years ahead. Your country is counting on you.

And don't forget to have some fun along the way too.

Thanks everybody. Good luck on the year ahead.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:50 p.m. on August 8 in the State Dining Room at the White House for broadcast on August 16. In the address, the Presi-

dent referred to Elizabeth Cooper, student, University of Northern Colorado. The transcript was made available by the Office of

the Press Secretary on August 15, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on August 16.

Letter to Congressional Leaders Reporting on the Commencement of United States Military Operations in Iraq August 17, 2014

Dear Mr. Speaker: (Dear Mr. President:)

On August 14, 2014, I authorized the U.S. Armed Forces to conduct targeted air strikes to support operations by Iraqi forces to recapture the Mosul Dam. These military operations will be limited in their scope and duration as necessary to support the Iraqi forces in their efforts to retake and establish control of this critical infrastructure site, as part of their ongoing campaign against the terrorist group the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). The failure of the Mosul Dam could threaten the lives of large numbers of civilians, endanger U.S. personnel and facilities, including the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, and prevent the Iraqi government from providing critical services to the Iraqi populace. Pursuant to this authorization, on the evening of August 15, 2014, U.S. military forces commenced targeted airstrike operations in Iraq.

I have directed these actions, which are in the national security and foreign policy interests of the United States, pursuant to my constitutional authority to conduct U.S. foreign relations and as Commander in Chief and Chief Executive. These actions are being undertaken in coordination with the Iraqi government.

I am providing this report as part of my efforts to keep the Congress fully informed, consistent with the War Powers Resolution (Public Law 93-148). I appreciate the support of the Congress in this action.

Sincerely,

BARACK OBAMA

NOTE: Identical letters were sent to John A. Boehner, Speaker of the House of Representatives, and Patrick J. Leahy, President pro tempore of the Senate.

Remarks on the Situations in Iraq and Ferguson, Missouri, and an Exchange With Reporters August 18, 2014

The President. Good afternoon, everybody. Earlier today I received an update from my team on two separate issues that I've been following closely: our ongoing operation in Iraq and the situation in Ferguson, Missouri.

With respect to Iraq, we continue to see important progress across different parts of our strategy to support the Iraqi Government and combat the threat from the terrorist group ISIL. First, our military operations are effectively protecting our personnel and facilities in Iraq. Over the last 11 days, American airstrikes have stopped the ISIL advance around the city of Erbil and pushed back the terrorists. Mean-

while, we have urgently provided additional arms and assistance to Iraqi forces, including Kurdish and Iraqi security forces who are fighting on the front lines.

Today, with our support, Iraqi and Kurdish forces took a major step forward by recapturing the largest dam in Iraq near the city of Mosul. The Mosul Dam fell under terrorist control earlier this month and is directly tied to our objective of protecting Americans in Iraq. If that dam was breached, it could have proven catastrophic, with floods that would have threatened the lives of thousands of civilians and endanger our Embassy compound in