

Remarks Prior to a Cabinet Meeting July 1, 2014

I thought I'd get the Cabinet together this morning because we all know that America will be busy this afternoon. Go Team U.S.A. [*Laughter*]

About the halfway point through this year, we can look back and see some enormous progress that we've been able to make on the economy. We continue to create jobs, over 9.4 million created over the last several years. We're continuing to see improvement in the housing market. We're continuing to see real progress in terms of the energy sector. But what we also know is, is that there's so much more that's possible.

And part of the reason that I wanted to bring the Cabinet together today is to underscore for them my belief—I think, shared by most Americans—that we can't wait for Congress to actually get going on issues that are vital to the middle class.

We've already seen the power of some of our executive actions in making a real difference for ordinary families, whether it's on minimum wage for Federal workers—or for workers who are with Federal contractors, equal pay, the terrific work that's being done around climate change so we're transitioning to a clean-energy economy.

But what I'm going to be urging all of you to do, and what I'm going to be continually pushing throughout this year and for the next couple of years, is that if Congress can't act on core issues that would actually make a difference in helping middle class families get ahead, then we're going to have to be creative about how we can make real progress.

Keep in mind that my preference is always going to be to work with Congress and to actually get legislation done. That's how we get some more permanent fixes. And as I mentioned yesterday with respect to immigration, whatever we do administratively is not going to be sufficient to solve a broken immigration system.

The same is true when it comes to infrastructure. We'll be talking a little bit about how we need to renew the highway trust fund. But more importantly, we could potentially put people to work all across the country, rebuilding roads and bridges, putting construction workers back to work. That could boost our economy enormously. And now is the time to do it, but that requires congressional action.

And so we're always going to prefer working on a bipartisan basis to get things done. That's what folks expect out of Washington. They're not looking for excuses, and they're not looking for a lot of partisan sniping. But if Congress is unable to do it, then all of our Cabinet members here head up big agencies that touch people's lives in all sorts of ways, and I'm going to be continually looking for ways in which we can show some real progress.

And the second topic that we're going to be spending a lot of time talking about is how do we continue to improve the functioning of Government to make it more customer friendly. This is something that we've been working on since Sylvia was head of OMB. And this is something that Shaun will be prioritizing. I expect every agency to look and see, how can we get more bang for the buck in the agencies that we operate? And I know that many of you can report some significant progress in reducing paperwork and bureaucracy and redtape for projects and initiatives around the country in education, in energy, in housing, and in transportation. But I think we can do even better.

So I'm looking forward to getting a report from you on the progress that has been made. And hopefully, we can share some ideas to see if we can make even more progress.

The bottom line is this: I went to Minnesota—many of the press here accompanied me—and had a wonderful conversation with folks around the country who are doing their jobs every single day, raising families, working hard, contributing to their communities. And their

hopes and aspirations are my primary focus and should be the primary focus of this town. They are extraordinarily cynical about Washington right now, and rightfully so. They just don't see any capacity by Congress to do anything. And we've seen a Congress that said no to increasing the minimum wage, said no to immigration reform, has said no to equal pay legislation. The only thing they seem to say yes to, the Republicans in the House at least, is more tax breaks for folks at the top. And as a consequence, the people who sent us here, they just don't feel as if anybody is fighting for them and working for them.

We're not always going to be able to get things through Congress, at least this Con-

gress, the way we'd want to. But we sure as heck can make sure that the folks back home know that we're pushing their agenda and that we're working hard on their behalf and we're doing every single thing we can do to make a difference in their lives. So I want to make sure that we emphasize not what we can't do, but what we can do, in the coming months.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:04 a.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Sylvia Mathews Burwell, former Director, and Shaun L.S. Donovan, Director-designate, Office of Management and Budget.

Remarks at Georgetown Waterfront Park July 1, 2014

Well, hello, everybody. Have a seat, have a seat. It's hot. [*Laughter*] It's hot out. Anthony, take off your coat, man. [*Laughter*] It is hot, and Team U.S.A. takes the pitch in a couple hours, so we've got to get down to business. We don't have time for a lot of small talk. Am I right, Mr. Mayor? We've got to get going.

Behind me is one of the busiest bridges in Washington. And with the Fourth of July on Friday—also Malia's birthday, for those of you who are interested; she will be 16; it's a little worrisome—I would note that this bridge is named for the man who wrote "The Star-Spangled Banner," Francis Scott Key.

Three years ago, I came here to this very spot, to the Key Bridge, to talk about how two of the five major bridges connecting DC to Virginia—including this one—were rated "structurally deficient." And with almost 120,000 vehicles crossing these bridges every day, I said it was important to fix them.

And today, that's exactly what we're doing. So, soon, construction workers will be on the job making the Key Bridge safer for commuters and for families and even for Members of Congress to cross. [*Laughter*] This is made possible by something called the highway trust fund, which Congress established back in the 1950s and which helps States repair and re-

build our infrastructure all across the country. It's an example of what can happen when Washington just functions the way it was supposed to.

Back then, you had Eisenhower, a Republican President; over time, you would have Democratic Presidents, Democratic and Republican Members of Congress all recognizing, building bridges and roads and levees and ports and airports—that none of that is a partisan issue. That's making sure that America continues to progress.

Now, here is the problem. Here is the reason we're here in the heat. If this Congress does not act by the end of the summer, the highway trust fund will run out. Won't be any money there. All told, nearly 700,000 jobs could be at risk next year. That would be like Congress threatening to lay off the entire population of Denver or Seattle or Boston. That's a lot of people. It would be a bad idea. Right now there are more than a hundred thousand active projects across the country where workers are paving roads and rebuilding bridges and modernizing our transit systems. And soon, States may have to choose which projects to continue and which ones to put the brakes on because they're running out of money. Some have already done just that, just because