

The days and weeks ahead will be critical. Our negotiations have made progress, but gaps remain. And there are people, in both our countries and beyond, who oppose a diplomatic resolution. My message to you, the people of Iran, is that, together, we have to speak up for the future we seek.

As I have said many times before, I believe that our countries should be able to resolve this issue peacefully, with diplomacy. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei has issued a fatwa against the development of nuclear weapons, and President Rouhani has said that Iran would never develop a nuclear weapon. Together with the international community, the United States has said that Iran should have access to peaceful nuclear energy, consistent with Iran's international obligations. So there is a way for Iran—if it is willing to take meaningful, verifiable steps—to assure the world that its nuclear program is, in fact, for peaceful purposes only.

In this sense, Iran's leaders have a choice between two paths. If they cannot agree to a reasonable deal, they will keep Iran on the path it's on today, a path that has isolated Iran and the Iranian people from so much of the world, caused so much hardship for Iranian families, and deprived so many young Iranians the jobs and opportunities they deserve.

On the other hand, if Iran's leaders can agree to a reasonable deal, it can lead to a better path, the path of greater opportunities for the Iranian people: more trade and ties with

the world; more foreign investment and jobs, including for young Iranians; more cultural exchanges and chances for Iranian students to travel abroad; more partnerships in areas like science and technology and innovation. In other words, a nuclear deal now can help open the door to a brighter future for you, the Iranian people, who, as heirs to a great civilization, have so much to give the world.

This is what's at stake today. And this moment may not come again soon. I believe that our nations have an historic opportunity to resolve this issue peacefully, an opportunity we should not miss. As the poet Hafez wrote: "It is early spring. Try to be joyful in your heart. For many a flower will bloom while you will be in clay."

For decades, our nations have been separated by mistrust and fear. Now it is early spring. We have a chance—a chance—to make progress that will benefit our countries and the world for many years to come. Now it is up to all of us, Iranians and Americans, to seize this moment and the possibilities that can bloom in this new season.

Thank you, and *Nowruzetan Pirooz*.

NOTE: The remarks were recorded at approximately 1:20 p.m. on March 12 in the Roosevelt Room at the White House for broadcast on March 19. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Persian language transcript of these remarks.

Memorandum on Establishing the Director of White House Information Technology and the Executive Committee for Presidential Information Technology

March 19, 2015

Memorandum for the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the National Security Advisor, and the Director of the Office of Administration

Subject: Establishing the Director of White House Information Technology and the Execu-

tive Committee for Presidential Information Technology

By the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, and in order to improve the information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and

Executive Office of the President (EOP), I hereby direct the following:

Section 1. Policy. The purposes of this memorandum are to ensure that the information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP are efficient, secure, and resilient; establish a model for Government information technology management efforts; reduce operating costs through the elimination of duplication and overlapping services; and accomplish the goal of converging disparate information resources and information systems for the EOP.

This memorandum is intended to maintain the President's exclusive control of the information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP. High-quality, efficient, interoperable, and safe information systems and information resources are required in order for the President to discharge the duties of his office with the support of those who advise and assist him, and with the additional assistance of all EOP components. The responsibilities that this memorandum vests in the Director of White House Information Technology, as described below, have been performed historically within the EOP, and it is the intent of this memorandum to continue this practice.

The Director of White House Information Technology, on behalf of the President, shall have the primary authority to establish and coordinate the necessary policies and procedures for operating and maintaining the information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP. Nothing in this memorandum may be construed to delegate the ownership, or any rights associated with ownership, of any information resources or information systems, nor of any record, to any entity outside of the EOP.

Sec. 2. Director of White House Information Technology. (a) There is hereby established the Director of White House Information Technology (Director). The Director shall be the senior officer responsible for the information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP

by the Presidential Information Technology Community (Community). The Director shall:

- (i) be designated by the President;
- (ii) have the rank and status of a commissioned officer in the White House Office; and
- (iii) have sufficient seniority, education, training, and expertise to provide the necessary advice, coordination, and guidance to the Community.

(b) The Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations shall provide the Director with necessary direction and supervision.

(c) The Director shall ensure the effective use of information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP in order to improve mission performance, and shall have the appropriate authority to promulgate all necessary procedures and rules governing these resources and systems. The Director shall provide policy coordination and guidance for, and periodically review, all activities relating to the information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP by the Community, including expenditures for, and procurement of, information resources and information systems by the Community. Such activities shall be subject to the Director's coordination, guidance, and review in order to ensure consistency with the Director's strategy and to strengthen the quality of the Community's decisions through integrated analysis, planning, budgeting, and evaluation processes.

(d) The Director may advise and confer with appropriate executive departments and agencies, individuals, and other entities as necessary to perform the Director's duties under this memorandum.

Sec. 3. Executive Committee for Presidential Information Technology. There is hereby established an Executive Committee for Presidential Information Technology (Committee). The Committee consists of the following officials or their designees: the Assistant to the President for Management and Administration; the Executive Secretary of the National Security Council; the Director of the Office of

Administration; the Director of the United States Secret Service; and the Director of the White House Military Office.

Sec. 4. Administration. (a) The President or the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations may assign the Director and the Committee any additional functions necessary to advance the mission set forth in this memorandum.

(b) The Committee shall advise and make policy recommendations to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and the Director with respect to operational and procurement decisions necessary to achieve secure, seamless, reliable, and integrated information resources and information systems for the President, Vice President, and EOP. The Director shall update the Committee on both strategy and execution, as requested, including collaboration efforts with the Federal Chief Information Officer, with other government agencies, and by participating in the Chief Information Officers Council.

(c) The Secretary of Defense shall designate or appoint a White House Technology Liaison for the White House Communications Agency and the Secretary of Homeland Security shall designate or appoint a White House Technology Liaison for the United States Secret Service. Any entity that becomes a part of the Community after the issuance of this memorandum shall designate or appoint a White House Technology Liaison for that entity. The designation or appointment of a White House Technology Liaison is subject to the review of, and shall be made in consultation with, the President or his designee. The Chief Information Officer of the Office of Administration and the Chief Information Officer of the National Security Council, and their successors in function, are designated as White House Technology Liaisons for their respective components. In coordination with the Director, the White House Technology Liaisons shall ensure that the day-to-day operation of and long-term strategy for information resources and information systems provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP are interoperable and effectively function as a single, modern, and high-quality enterprise that reduces duplication, inefficiency, and waste.

(d) The President or his designee shall retain the authority to specify the application of operating policies and procedures, including security measures, which are used in the construction, operation, and maintenance of any information resources or information system provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP.

(e) Presidential Information Technology Community entities shall:

(i) assist and provide information to the Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations and the Director, consistent with applicable law, as may be necessary to implement this memorandum; and

(ii) as soon as practicable after the issuance of this memorandum, enter into any memoranda of understanding as necessary to give effect to the provisions of this memorandum.

(f) As soon as practicable after the issuance of this memorandum, EOP components shall take all necessary steps, either individually or collectively, to ensure the proper creation, storage, and transmission of EOP information on any information systems and information resources provided to the President, Vice President, and EOP.

Sec. 5. Definitions. As used in this memorandum:

(a) “Information resources,” “information systems,” and “information technology” have the meanings assigned by section 3502 of title 44, United States Code.

(b) “Presidential Information Technology Community” means the entities that provide information resources and information systems to the President, Vice President, and EOP, including:

- (i) the National Security Council;
- (ii) the Office of Administration;
- (iii) the United States Secret Service;
- (iv) the White House Military Office; and
- (v) the White House Communications Agency.

(c) “Executive Office of the President” means:

- (i) each component of the EOP as is or may hereafter be established;
- (ii) any successor in function to an EOP component that has been abolished and of which the function is retained in the EOP; and
- (iii) the President's Commission on White House Fellowships, the President's Intelligence Advisory Board, the Residence of the Vice President, and such other entities as the President from time to time may determine.

Sec. 6. General Provisions. (a) Nothing in this memorandum shall be construed to impair or otherwise affect:

- (i) the authority granted by law to an executive department, agency, entity, office, or the head thereof; or

- (ii) the functions of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget relating to budgetary, administrative, or legislative proposals.

(b) This memorandum shall be implemented consistent with applicable law and appropriate protections for privacy and civil liberties, and subject to the availability of appropriations.

(c) This memorandum is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

BARACK OBAMA

Remarks at the White House Student Film Festival March 20, 2015

The President. Hello! Thank you so much, everybody! Have a seat. Well, hello, everybody, and welcome to the second annual White House Film Festival. It's like the Sundance or Cannes of film festivals that are open to the public through a Government website. [Laughter] It may also be the only film festival where one of the entrants has his tooth loose. [Laughter] And is—may pull it out right here at the ceremony. [Laughter] Everybody looks wonderful, of course. You'll be disappointed to know I will not be doing a musical number based on this year's films.

Audience members. Aww.

The President. That's the job of your emcees, Kal Penn and Terrence J. Give them a big round of applause. I don't know if they'll be doing musical numbers either. [Laughter] But I do want to thank the folks at the American Film Institute and Participant Media for partnering with us on this event. Thank you very much. Give them a big round of applause.

I want to give a shout out to all the honorees' dates tonight, which I assume are either parents or teachers or somebody who's sup-

ported these outstanding young people every step of the way. And of course, most importantly, let's give it up to our outstanding young filmmakers! [Applause] Yay! Yay!

So I love this event. This is the second year that we've hosted the White House Student Film Festival, and it's a great example of what happens when we just unleash the skills and the imagination of America's young people. In this country, if we give all of our kids the best opportunities and technology and resources, there's no telling what they'll create, now and the years ahead.

This year, we received more than 1,500 submissions that came from all across the country, actually, even came as far as Azerbaijan. Our theme was "The Impact of Giving Back." And today we are proud to honor our 15 official selections, because these aren't just great films, but they're great examples of how young people are making a difference all over the country.

Today we're celebrating a 6-year-old in Montana. [Applause] Is that you? He's the guy without—he's missing teeth and—[laughter].

But he's also challenging us to see conservation through a child's eyes.

We're honoring a young man's story of service to his family and our environment in his Navajo Nation, Navajo tradition; a teenager who started a wheelchair challenge and raised tens of thousands of dollars to make his school more accessible to folks with disabilities; a third-grade superhero who wears a cape as he delivers clothes and food to the homeless. You see, even in indie film festivals, superhero movies are infiltrating. [Laughter] I'm going to have to see "Super Ewan 2" next summer. [Laughter] There's going to be a sequel.

And then there are two young women, Allyson Edwards and Madison Jaco, who adopted a highway to clean up the roads in their hometown of Hawkins, Texas. Where are these young ladies? Raise your hands. A little higher. There you go. So they decided they wanted to make an even bigger impact, so they reached out to young people all across the globe—and this is part of the power of the Internet—and now you've got groups in India, France, Nigeria, Benin, Argentina, all getting into the act—cleaning up their schools and beaches and roads—just because of these two young women.

And as Allyson and Madison say in their film, "In today's society, we're often told how much we are different and how much divides us, but through our shared community service, we realized how much brings us together." That's a profound statement, guys. [Laughter] I don't think I was that smart when I was your age.

But that's the idea that lies at the heart of service: empathy, understanding, being able to make a connection. And as these young people are showing us, it's a message that can be told powerfully through film, because that's a media that connects us with people and stories we might otherwise never know. And it puts us in the shoes of people on—potentially on the other side of the world or a neighborhood very different than the one we grew up in. And that's true whether you're a middle schooler with a GoPro or a Hollywood director on a custom-made soundstage.

Now, we know that if today's middle schoolers are going to become those big-time directors—and we've got some big-time folks here. I mean, is Steve McQueen here? Has filmed "12 Years a Slave." It was a big Oscar winner last year and a profound film. And we appreciate his presence here today. So you guys could get some tips. [Laughter]

But the next Steve McQueen or Scorsese or Spielberg or documentarian like Ken Burns—if we're going to make sure that these young people have those opportunities, then we've got to do our part to support them.

That means we've got to give them a world-class education, access to science and technology and engineering and math, as well as the arts. It means that they've got to have access to the technology they need to learn and explore and grow.

It's not optional to have access to that technology in today's world. That's one of the reasons I launched the ConnectED initiative: to connect 99 percent of our students to next-generation broadband and wireless. Because when we expect free WiFi with our coffee, then we should at least have it in our schools and our libraries too.

And the good news is, we're making great progress. More than 1,800 school districts have pledged to bring high-speed broadband and digital learning to their students. Companies have committed billions of dollars in free technology for schools and libraries around the country. And it's making a difference. Students in rural Alabama used software donated by Adobe to make a music video that won first place in a contest and then earned their school \$10,000 of new musical equipment. So we know this can make a difference.

But we also know that it takes more than technology to help our kids thrive: parents, teachers, people who love and inspire them, coaches, mentors to help guide their way. So today, as part of our "United We Serve" effort, I'm proud to announce that AFI and the Screen Actors Guild–American Federation of Television and Radio Artists are pairing up to give each of the young filmmakers here a

mentor who can bring out the best of them in the months ahead. Now, that's pretty cool. [Applause] What do you think? Right?

And the organizations are also reaching beyond these young people. They're going to pledge a million hours of educational and mentoring programs for young people across the country over the next 3 years, which is a remarkable commitment, so we want to thank AFI and SAG-AFTRA for that wonderful contribution.

We've seen how impactful these mentoring experiences can be. I'll just take a minute to give you one example, the story of a young woman who we honored here last year named Shelly Ortiz. And Shelly made this wonderful video—is Shelly here?

Student filmmaker Shelly Ortiz. Yes!

The President. There you are. There's Shelly. Good to see you. So I'm going to brag about you for a second.

So Shelly made a great video about how technology in her classroom helped fuel her passion for filmmaking. But when Shelly came to the White House, she was still working on another project that meant a lot to her, which was a short documentary about how her father was abandoned by his mom as a child and all the ramifications, what that meant.

After the festival, AFI connected her with an accomplished documentarian, who served as her mentor, in giving Shelly detailed notes and the confidence to take risks as a director. A few months later, Shelly's documentary was featured at AFI's International Documentary Festival. Pretty cool. And today, she says that the mentoring she received and the technology

she's been given didn't just help her become a better filmmaker, it helped her become closer than ever with her dad.

So that's the power of what is being done here. Experiences like these aren't just about a young person's future career. They're about helping them to connect in new and meaningful ways, whether it's somebody as close as your parents or somebody on an iPad halfway around the world who may share more in common with you than you think.

And we don't know what these new connections will produce down the road, but if these movies are any indication, I know that these young people are going to make an even bigger impact for their communities and their country in the years ahead.

So I'm proud of you. Keep up the great work. I can't stay to watch them all, but I'm going to get them all digitally. And I'm going to give them big thumbs-up. All right. Thank you. I'm really proud of you guys. Now it's time to begin our feature presentations. So see you guys!

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:36 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Noah Gue, student, Meadowlark Elementary School in Bozeman, MT; actors Kal Penn and Terrence Jenkins; Keanu B. Jones, student, Flagstaff Arts and Leadership Academy in Flagstaff, AZ; Archer Hadley, student, Austin High School in Austin, TX; Ewan Drum, student, New Haven Elementary School in New Haven, MI; and Shelly Ortiz, student, Metropolitan Arts Institute in Phoenix, AZ, and her father Epi Ortiz.

Statement on United States Citizens Detained or Missing in Iran March 20, 2015

The spirit of family is deeply woven into all of the rich cultural traditions of the Nowruz holiday. It is a time for reuniting and rejoicing with loved ones and sharing hopes for the new year. Today, as families across the world gather to mark this holiday, we remember those American families who are enduring painful

separations from their loved ones who are imprisoned or went missing in Iran.

Saeed Abedini of Boise, Idaho, has spent 2½ years detained in Iran on charges related to his religious beliefs. He must be returned to his wife and two young children, who needlessly continue to grow up without their father.

Amir Hekmati of Flint, Michigan, has been imprisoned in Iran on false espionage charges for over 3½ years. His family, including his father who is gravely ill, has borne the pain of Amir's absence for far too long.

Jason Rezaian of Marin County, California, an Iranian Government-credentialed reporter for the Washington Post, has been unjustly held in Iran for nearly 8 months on vague charges. It is especially painful that on a holiday centered on ridding one's self of the difficulties of the past year, Jason's mother and family will continue to carry the heavy burden of concern regarding Jason's health and well-being into the new year.

And finally, we recently marked yet another anniversary since Robert Levinson went missing on Kish Island. His family has now endured the hardship of his disappearance for over 8 years.

At this time of renewal, compassion, and understanding, I reiterate my commitment to bringing our citizens home and call on the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran to immediately release Saeed Abedini, Amir Hekmati, and Jason Rezaian and to work cooperatively with us to find Robert Levinson so that they all can be safely reunited with their families as soon as possible.

In honor of the familial spirit so strongly enshrined within this holiday and for the Abedini, Hekmati, Rezaian, and Levinson families, I hope this new spring is filled with joyous moments for us all with all of our loved ones by our sides.

NOTE: The statement referred to Naghmeh Abedini, wife of Saeed Abedini, and their children Jacob and Rebekka; Ali Hekmati, father of Amir M. Hekmati; and Mary Rezaian, mother of Jason Rezaian.

Statement on the Death of Lucy Coffey *March 20, 2015*

In 1943, a supermarket worker in Dallas named Lucy Coffey left behind her home and her job to answer her country's call. In her 2 years with the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps, Sergeant Coffey served throughout the Pacific theater with distinction, earning two Bronze Stars. After the war, Sergeant Coffey continued to serve her country as an Army civilian, and the example set by her and her fellow WACs has inspired generations of patriots since.

When Vice President Biden and I had the honor of meeting Sergeant Coffey at the White House last year, she was America's oldest living woman veteran, and it was clear that the passage of time never dampened her patriotic love of country or her pioneering spirit. As we remember her life and salute her service, our thoughts and prayers are with her family, friends, and loved ones today.

Message to the Congress Transmitting the District of Columbia's Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request *March 20, 2015*

To the Congress of the United States:

Pursuant to my constitutional authority and as contemplated by section 446 of the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act as amended in 1989, I am transmitting the District of Columbia's fiscal year (FY) 2015 Budget and Financial Plan. This transmittal does not represent an endorsement of the contents of the D.C. government's requests.

The proposed FY 2015 Budget and Financial Plan reflects the major programmatic objectives of the Mayor and the Council of the District of Columbia. For FY 2015, the District estimates total revenues and expenditures of \$12.6 billion.

BARACK OBAMA

The White House,
March 20, 2015.

The President's Weekly Address

March 21, 2015

Hi, everybody. One of the most important positions in the President's Cabinet—and to our national security, our law enforcement, and our criminal justice system—is the Attorney General.

It's been more than 4 months since I nominated Loretta Lynch to serve as the next Attorney General of the United States. For 30 years, Loretta has distinguished herself as a tough, fair, and independent attorney. As the U.S. Attorney for the Eastern District of New York, she successfully prosecuted the terrorists who plotted to bomb the Federal Reserve Bank and the New York City subway. She helped secure billions in settlements for people wronged by some of the world's biggest banks. She's been dogged in her pursuit of public corruption. She's jailed some of New York's most violent and notorious mobsters and gang members. And through it all, she's worked closely with law enforcement and local communities to get the job done.

In short, her qualifications are superb. That's why, in the past, the Senate easily confirmed Loretta to lead one of the most prominent U.S. attorney offices in the country, not once, but twice.

Still, it has been more than 4 months since I nominated Loretta Lynch to serve as Attorney General. And this time, Republican leaders in Congress won't even let her nomination come up for a vote. In fact, by Monday, Loretta will have been languishing on the Senate floor for longer than the seven previous Attorney Gen-

erals combined. Let me say that again: She will have been waiting for a simple yes-or-no vote on the Senate floor for longer than the seven previous Attorneys General combined.

No one can claim she's unqualified. No one's saying she can't do the job. Senators from both parties say they support her. This is purely about politics. First, Republicans held up her nomination because they were upset about the actions I took to make our broken immigration system smarter and fairer. Now they're denying her a vote until they can figure out how to pass a bill on a completely unrelated issue. But they could bring her up for a yes-or-no vote at any time.

Republicans promised that Congress would function smoothly with them in charge. Here's a small chance for them to prove it. Congress should stop playing politics with law enforcement and national security. They should support good people in both parties who want to reform our criminal justice system. And that means they should end the longest confirmation process for an Attorney General in three decades and give Loretta Lynch a vote.

Thanks, and have a great weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:45 p.m. on March 20 in the Map Room at the White House for broadcast on March 21. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 20, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on March 21.

Statement on the Fifth Anniversary of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

March 22, 2015

On the 5-year anniversary of the Affordable Care Act, one thing couldn't be clearer: This law is working, and in many ways, it's working even better than anticipated.

After 5 years of the Affordable Care Act, more than 16 million uninsured Americans

have gained the security of health insurance, an achievement that has cut the ranks of the uninsured by nearly one-third. These aren't just numbers. Because of this law, there are parents who can finally afford to take their kids to the doctor. There are families who no longer

risk losing their home or savings just because someone gets sick. There are young people free to pursue their dreams and start their own business without worrying about losing access to health care. There are Americans who, without this law, would not be alive today.

For Americans who already had insurance before this law was passed, the Affordable Care Act has meant new savings and new protections. Today, tens of millions of Americans with preexisting conditions are no longer at risk of being denied coverage. Women no longer have to worry about being charged more just for being women. Millions of young people have been able to stay on their parents' plan until they turn 26. More than 9 million seniors and people with disabilities have saved an average of \$1,600 per person on their prescription medicine, over \$15 billion in all since the Affordable Care Act became law. More than 70 million Americans have gained access to preventive care, including contraceptive services, with no additional out-of-pocket costs. And the law has helped improve the quality of health care: It's a major reason we saw 50,000 fewer preventable patient deaths in hospitals over the last 3 years of data.

The cynics said this law would kill jobs and cripple our economy. Despite the fact that our businesses have created nearly 12 million new jobs since this law was passed, some still insist it's a threat. But a growing body of evidence—actual facts—shows that the Affordable Care Act is good for our economy. In stark contrast to predictions that this law would cause premiums to skyrocket, last year, the growth in health care premium costs for businesses matched its lowest level on record. If premi-

ums had kept growing over the last 4 years at the rate they had in the last decade, the average family premium would be \$1,800 higher than it is today. That's \$1,800 that stays in your pocket or doesn't come out of your paycheck. And in part because health care prices have grown at their slowest rate in nearly 50 years since this law was passed, we've been able to cut our deficits by two-thirds. Health care costs that have long been the biggest factor driving our projected long-term up deficits up are now the single biggest factor driving those deficits down.

The Affordable Care Act has been the subject of more scrutiny, more rumor, more attempts to dismantle and undermine it than just about any law in recent history. But 5 years later, it is succeeding. In fact, it's working better than even many of its supporters expected. It's time to embrace reality. Instead of trying yet again to repeal the Affordable Care Act and allowing special interests to write their own rules, we should work together to keep improving our health care system for everybody. Instead of kicking millions off their insurance and doubling the number of uninsured Americans, as the House Republican budget would do, we should work together to make sure every American has a chance to get covered.

Five years ago, we declared that in America, quality, affordable health care is not a privilege, it is a right. And I'll never stop working to protect that right for those who already have it and extend it to those who don't so that all of us can experience the blessings of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in this country we love.

Statement on the Death of Former Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore

March 22, 2015

I was deeply saddened to learn of the death of Singapore's Minister Mentor, Lee Kuan Yew. On behalf of the American people, Michelle and I offer our deepest condolences to the Lee family and join the people of Singapore

in mourning the loss of this remarkable man. A visionary who led his country from Singapore's independence in 1965 to build one of the most prosperous countries in the world today, he was a devoted public servant and a remarkable

leader. Minister Mentor Lee's views and insights on Asian dynamics and economic management were respected by many around the world, and no small number of this and past generations of world leaders have sought his advice on governance and development. I personally appreciated his wisdom, including our

discussions during my trip to Singapore in 2009, which were hugely important in helping me formulate our policy of rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific. He was a true giant of history who will be remembered for generations to come as the father of modern Singapore and as one the great strategists of Asian affairs.

Remarks at the White House Science Fair March 23, 2015

The President. Hello, everybody! Hello, hello! Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Thank you. Hello, scientists. [*Laughter*]

Science Fair participants. Hello!

The President. So this is—got to be the most fun event of the year. [*Laughter*] At least in the top three. And before I go any further, though, I need to lay down some rules. We had to put these in place based on the previous science fairs. First of all, no taking your robots or electric go-carts for a spin on the South Lawn. [*Laughter*] You can't do that. Rule number two, if you're going to explode something, you have to warn us first. [*Laughter*] Actually, don't—just don't explode anything. [*Laughter*] Number three, no using a marshmallow air cannon in the house—[*laughter*]—unless you let me shoot it first. [*Laughter*]

This is our fifth White House Science Fair. And every year, I walk out smarter than I walked in, because these young people have something to teach all of us, not just about batteries or attacking cancer cells or how to build a working robot or a rocket. I will say, though, the robots I see keep getting smarter every year. We are keeping an eye on that, by the way. [*Laughter*] You're on notice, Skynet.

But these young scientists and engineers teach us something beyond the specific topics that they're exploring. They teach us how to question assumptions, to wonder why something is the way it is and how we can make it better. And they remind us that there's always something more to learn and to try and to discover and to imagine, and that it's never too early or too late to create or discover something new.

That's why we love science. It's more than a school subject or the periodic table or the properties of waves. It is an approach to the world, a critical way to understand and explore and engage with the world, and then have the capacity to change that world and to share this accumulated knowledge. It's a mindset that says we that can use reason and logic and honest inquiry to reach new conclusions and solve big problems. And that's what we are celebrating here today with these amazing young people.

Now, first of all, I'm going to announce the people who are not that young, although some of them are youngish. We're joined by some of America's top scientists and engineers, starting with my Science Adviser, John Holdren. [*Applause*] Yay, John. The Director of the National Institutes of Health, Francis Collins, is here. The head of our Patent and Trademark Office—so, young people, if you've got something fancy, talk to Michelle Lee right here. She's ready to sign you up. The Acting Director of the U.S. Geological Survey, Suzette Kimball, is here. And somebody who has one of the coolest jobs in town, the head of NASA, Charles Bolden, is here. Where's Charlie? If there are any aspiring astronauts here, he's the man to impress. [*Laughter*] He's been in space himself.

We also have some outstanding guests who are here who have been participating in this on an ongoing basis. Bill Nye, the Science Guy, is here. Signature bow tie. So is Rush Holt, who's one of the few scientists to serve in Congress. We could probably use some more. There you go. Rush is now the head of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. And

just so you knew that athletes think science is cool too, we've got Victor Cruz of the New York Giants here. He is a big fan of science. And he has to be. As an all-pro wide receiver, he's got to figure out trajectories and angles and velocities and the physics of doing the salsa. [Laughter] For those of you who don't know, he does a salsa every time he gets a touchdown, and he gets a lot of them. [Laughter]

Now, Victor has been here before to celebrate the New York Giants winning the Super Bowl. But as I've said many times before, we've got to celebrate the winners of our science fairs as much as we celebrate the winners of football or basketball or other athletic competitions, because young scientists, mathematicians, engineers, they're critical to our future. You guys are the ones who are going to define the contours of the 21st century.

And I just had a chance to meet some of these young people. And I fired a lot of questions at them, and they know their stuff. It is unbelievable what so many of these young people have accomplished at such an early age. And I wish I could talk about every single one of them because all of them were extraordinarily impressive. But I want to leave enough time for everybody else to explore some of their exhibits. John Holdren probably wants me to get some of their résumés—[laughter]—in case we're hiring. But let me just mention a few of the young people that I had a chance to talk to, to give you a sense of the scope and depth and quality of the work that they're doing.

So, first of all, we've got Sophia Sánchez-Maes, who's here from Las Cruces, New Mexico. Where's Sophia? I just talked to her. Did she get in? [Laughter] There she is, right there. The—Sophia is a senior in high school, and she is crazy about algae. [Laughter] Now, to the non-science buffs here, you might say, what's so great about algae? But Sophia knows that algae is fascinating, especially as a potential fuel source.

So scientists are already working to turn algae into fuel. One of the hurdles is to make the process more efficient so less energy gets wasted along the way. Sophia saw that was a chal-

lenge. She asked why. She has created a more efficient method. She's identified optimal algae to use in her method, and she's helping to bring the world closer to using algae as a clean, renewable, and even inexhaustible energy source. And it's already being tested in her hometown, the process that she's developing. It is amazing. So let's give Sophia a big round of applause.

Harry Paul is here from Port Washington, New York. Where's Harry? There's Harry, right here. So Harry graduated and is now in his first year at Tufts. But listen to this story, because I think it gives you a sense of the quality of the young people we've got here. Harry was born with a condition called congenital scoliosis, a curvature of the spine. So growing up, Harry endured more than a dozen operations. Rather than feel sorry for himself, he thought, there's got to be a better way of doing this. So he designed a new type of spinal implant.

Starting in his freshman year in high school, he started researching the processes that he himself had gone through—his doctor was an expert on this—and he decided, let's see if I can come up with something better, an implant that can grow along with the growing child so it doesn't have to be constantly replaced or adjusted, which means you don't need as many intrusive operations. And Harry's implant could reduce the number of surgeries that a child may need for more than a dozen to as few as five, which obviously would cut down medical costs, but more importantly, would save a lot of young people pain and time out from school and recovery time and the potential complications of an operation.

Unbelievable stuff. Give Harry a big round of applause.

So Nikhil Behari is here from Pennsylvania. Where's Nikhil. There's Nikhil. He is a freshman—right?—in high school, interested in how we can better protect ourselves against hackers and data thieves online. So scientists are already using biometrics to prove that each of us walk in our own distinct ways. And Nikhil wondered, what if we each type in a distinctive ways? So he collected all kinds of data about

how a person types—their speed, how often they pause, how much pressure they use—built a special keyboard to test it. And he proved that his hypothesis was correct: that even if somebody knows your password, they don't necessarily punch it in exactly the way you do.

And he asked why, and made discoveries that now could help keep our online accounts more secure. So in the future, if keystroke-based authentication keeps your siblings from breaking into your Facebook account—[laughter]—or your Instagram account, you will know who to thank. [Laughter] It will be Nikhil. [Laughter] Congratulations.

So those three are just samples of the extraordinary scientists that we've already—and engineers—that we've already got here.

I should give special mention to our Girl Scouts from Oklahoma. Where are those Super Girls? [Applause] Yes. You can't—they're standing up, but you can't really see them—[laughter]—because they're in kindergarten and first grade. They are today's youngest scientists, at 6 years old. They built their device out of Legos. They realized that some people who might be paralyzed or arthritic might have trouble turning pages on a book, so they invented this page turner. It was awesome. [Laughter] It was working so well, despite the fact, as they pointed out—this is a quote—they said, "This is just a prototype." [Laughter] That's what they said. So this is just a—I said, well, how'd you come up with the idea? They said, "Well, we had a brainstorming session." [Laughter] And then, one of them asked, "Mr. President, have you had brainstorming sessions?" [Laughter] I said, yes, but I didn't come up with something as cool as this—[laughter]—it's an automatic page turner. Unbelievable.

Ruchi Pandya—where's Ruchi? There's Ruchi. Found a way to use a single—[applause]—Richi found a way to use a single drop of blood to test a person's heart function, much like a person with diabetes tests their blood sugar.

Anvita Gupta—where's Anvita? There she is. Used artificial intelligence and biochemistry to identify potential treatments for cancer, tu-

berculosis, Ebola. What she's done is, she's developed an algorithm that could potentially, significantly speed up the process of finding drugs that might work against these diseases.

Something smells like it's burning there—[laughter]—and I don't think it's an experiment. [Laughter] I think it's somebody's camera. Do we have it under control? We don't see any flames bursting. Yes? All right. Okay, it sounds like a little electrical short, but let's keep monitoring that. [Laughter] Exits will be—[laughter]—in that direction, should anything happen. The last time there was a fire here, the British were invading. So—[laughter].

But Anvita's algorithm has the potential of speeding up pathways to discovering what drugs would work on what diseases and is consistent with some of the work that we announced around precision medicine that we are funding at a significant pace here at the White House.

Now, I should point out that, like several of the young people here, Anvita and Ruchi are first-generation Americans. Their parents came here, in part, so their kids could develop their talents and make a difference in the world. And we're really glad they did.

So I want to congratulate all of you for your remarkable achievements. You've made a lot of people proud: your parents, your teachers, your friends, your mentors. And as President, I'm proud of you, because America is going to be stronger and smarter and healthier and a much more interesting place because of you.

But it's not enough for our country just to be proud of you. We've also got to support you. We've got to make sure that young people like you are going to keep on having what you need to discover and experiment and to innovate. So I've got three announcements to make that really were already kind of in the works before I met you guys, but it's a pretty good occasion to announce them because you're so inspiring.

First, four years ago, I set a national goal to provide 98 percent of Americans with high-speed wireless Internet so that any young scientist or entrepreneur could access the world's information. Today I can announce that we

have achieved that goal, and we did it ahead of schedule. That's a big deal.

Second, to make sure that we keep expanding broadband across the country, I'm creating a new team called the Broadband Opportunity Council, made up of leaders across Government, who will work with business and communities to invest in next-generation Internet nationwide. Because this not just going to be a key for your ability to learn and create; it's also a key for America's ability to compete and lead in the world.

Number three, no young person in America should miss out on the chance to excel in these fields just because they don't have the resources. So 5 years ago, we launched a campaign called Educate To Innovate, to help more of our students explore science, technology, engineering and math. Today I'm pleased to announce \$240 million in new contributions from businesses, from schools, from foundations across the country to help kids learn in these STEM fields. So we are very, very proud to make that announcement.

Corporations have pledged to help expand high-quality science and technology education to more than 1.5 million students. More than 120 universities have pledged to help train 20,000 new engineers to tackle the toughest challenges of this century. Foundations like the Howard Hughes Medical Institute and the Gates Foundation and the Simons Foundation will support scientists early in their careers with mentoring and funding. And all told, these new commitments bring our grand total up to \$1 billion in commitments to our kids since we first got this initiative started 5 years ago.

And I was talking to some of the folks who are helping to finance our efforts, and one of the things that they've discovered is that it's not enough just to talk about STEM. Part of what's important to do is also to recognize that what you do in math and engineering and science has a purpose to it; that there are huge challenges that we have to solve in how we have clean energy and how do we clean up our environment and how do we solve crippling diseases like Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. And

when we give students the inspiration not just of—that math and science are inherently interesting and technology and engineering are inherently interesting, but there's actual problems to solve, it turns out that young people, they rise to the challenge. And that's what's so exciting about it.

We don't want to just increase the number of American students in STEM, we want to make sure everybody is involved. We want to increase the diversity of STEM programs as well. And that's been a theme of this Science Fair. We get the most out of all our Nation's talent, and that means reaching out to boys and girls, men and women of all races, all backgrounds. Science is for all of us. And we want our classrooms and labs and workplaces and media to reflect that.

And this is something that Megan Smith, our Chief Technology Officer, is really keen about. Part of the problem is, we don't tell the stories enough of the incredible scientists and inventors along the way who are women or people of color, and as a consequence, people don't see themselves as potential scientists. Except, the good news is, these young women and African American and Latino and Asian American folks, young people who are here today, you guys certainly see yourselves as scientists. So you're helping to inspire your classmates and kids who are coming up behind you to pursue these dreams as well. And that's what's so exciting.

Because the United States has always been a place that loves science. We've always been obsessed with tinkering and discovering and inventing and pushing the very boundaries of what's possible. That's who we are. It's in our DNA. Technological discovery helped us become the world's greatest economic power. Scientific and medical breakthroughs helped us become the greatest source of hope around the world. And that's not just our past, that's also our future, because of amazing young people like this.

So I want to thank you for inspiring me. You got me off to a good start today. *[Laughter]* Keep exploring. Keep dreaming. Keep asking why. Don't settle for what you already know.

Never stop believing in the power of your ideas, your imagination, your hard work to change the world.

And to all the adults in the room, and to any Members of Congress who might be listening—[laughter]—just think about all—oh, Eddie Bernice Johnson is here, an outstanding Member of Congress, who’s a big supporter of STEM education. Just remember, all these young people—to continue to pursue the research that might bring about a new clean energy source or might cure a disease, a lot of them are going to need the capacity to get research positions and fellowships and grants. And that—particularly when it comes to basic research—has typically been funded by the Federal Government. And my Federal budget promotes a significant increase in the kinds of research that needs to happen. Unfortunately, some of the budgets coming out of Congress don’t make those same commitments.

So it’s not enough for us to just lift up young people and say, great job, way to go. You also

have to have labs to go to, and you’ve got to be able to support yourself while you’re doing this amazing research. And that involves us as a society making the kind of investments that are going to be necessary for us to continue to innovate for many, many years to come.

So congratulations. Give all these young people a big round of applause. Go take a look at their outstanding stuff. It’s really great.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:15 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Oheneba Boachie-Adjei, president and founder, Foundation of Orthopedics and Complex Spine; Nikhil Behari, student, North Allegheny Intermediate High School in Pittsburgh, PA; Emily Bergenroth, Alicia Cutter, Karissa Cheng, Addy Oneal, and Emery Dodson, members of the Daisy Girl Scout Troop 411 in Tulsa, OK; Ruchi Pandya, student, Lynbrook High School in San Jose, CA; and Anvita Gupta, student, Carl Hayden Community High School in Scottsdale, AZ.

Remarks at the SelectUSA Investment Summit in National Harbor, Maryland March 23, 2015

Thank you so much. Thank you. Please have a seat. Well, thank you, everybody. And let me begin by thanking Penny Pritzker for her outstanding leadership. We’ve got six Cabinet Secretaries and dozens of U.S. Ambassadors here, which should tell you that SelectUSA is a major priority for this administration. Since I was here with you 17 months ago, this gathering has doubled in size. So I want to thank all 2,600 of you: elected officials and local leaders from across this country and business leaders from around the world. Thank you for making this a priority as well.

The fact is, there’s never been a more exciting time for us to do business together. And today I want to talk about why America is not only the right place for you to invest, but why America is the safest, strongest, smartest place for you to invest than we’ve been in a very long time.

After the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, America is now in the midst of the longest streak of private sector job growth on record: 60 straight months, 12 million new jobs. Businesses in America have added more than 200,000 jobs each month for 12 straight months. That’s the first time that’s happened in nearly 40 years.

Our unemployment rate has fallen from a peak of 10 percent in 2009 to 5.5 percent today. After a decade of outsourcing, we’re starting to bring good jobs back to America. Over the last 5 years, manufacturers have added jobs at a rate not seen since the 1980s. In fact, the manufacturing sector is actually growing faster than the rest of the economy. And last week, I announced nearly \$500 million in new public and private investment in strengthening American manufacturing.

And even though the United States is already home to more foreign direct investment than any other country in the world, we've worked hard to address some of the challenges that held us back for too long. Our high school graduation rate is now at an alltime high. More young people are earning their college degrees than ever before. Our energy production is booming, our energy costs are low, our leadership on climate change is restored. On the fiscal front, our deficits have shrunk by two-thirds. Our health care costs are flattening out for the first time in half a century.

Over the past 6 years, we've worked hard to make ourselves a smarter place to invest and to do business than any other country in the world. So we've got a good story to tell. And that's one reason I created SelectUSA, the first-ever Government-wide initiative to encourage more companies from around the world to invest and create jobs right here in the United States. We've got a good story to tell, but we wanted to make sure all of you had a chance to hear it. And the SelectUSA team wakes up every morning with one mission: bringing job-creating investment to the United States of America. It's a kind of one-stop shop, sort of a matchmaking service for investment.

Economic development organizations from around the country can connect with foreign investors from around the world who are interested in bringing their businesses here. Now, understand, a lot of State and local leaders in this room have been working tirelessly for a long time to attract foreign investment. The idea behind SelectUSA is just to make it easier for you to do that and easier for our international partners to find the best opportunities.

And by the beginning of this year, SelectUSA had assisted more than a thousand clients, helping to generate more than \$20 billion of investment in the United States, investment that has spurred economic growth and created jobs all across the country. The companies in this room have invested \$13 billion over the last year, which will create an estimated 32,500 new jobs.

So what's great about SelectUSA is that everybody wins. Communities that welcome foreign investors see more jobs and economic ac-

tivity, and they can reach more potential investors. The companies that invest in America have access to the largest market in the world, and it's a market that is strong and stable and growing.

And one thing I want to emphasize: It's not just big corporations or billion-dollar investments that make a difference. With the help of SelectUSA, for example, a Canadian company named Peds Legwear invested \$7 million to rescue a failing sock company in Burke County, North Carolina. And that investment saved 45 jobs. They recently cut the ribbon on a new plant that will ultimately create more than 200 new jobs. [Laughter] Had a little cheer back there. [Applause] That's good.

With the help from SelectUSA, Reha Technology, a Swiss medical robotics firm, just announced its merger with an American company called Interactive Motion Technologies. The new company will headquarter in Watertown, Massachusetts, and today it's announcing a new \$5 million investment to expand this year.

So we're seeing real results from SelectUSA, and we want to build on that momentum and get even more of you to invest. So today we're going to expand and improve our services. We're launching a new partnership between State and Federal economic development officials. We're launching the SelectUSA Academy, with online and onsite training programs for investors. We're improving our online investment tools, helping companies identify State-based incentives so that they can decide where to invest.

So, for companies considering new investment here, I want to be as clear as possible. The United States of America is the best place in the world to do business. We've got the most skilled and productive workers, the best universities, the most innovative entrepreneurs in the world. We're the global leader in patents, home not only to more R&D investment than any other country, but to nearly one-third of all R&D investment in the world. Our access to global markets makes it easy to ship goods made in the U.S.A. around the world. Our commitment to the rule of law and strong

intellectual property protections make America a dependable place to innovate and do business.

And we're a country that always believes we can do better, a country that adapts and advances and sets new standards for new times. It's one of the reasons why I have put forward a budget for this coming fiscal year that reflects the realities of the new economy. We're going to give workers and businesses the tools they need to succeed in a fast-paced, highly competitive, constantly changing world. And that means new investments in education, new investments in job training, including making 2 years of community college free, because we want to make sure that our workers continue to be prepared to fill the jobs that you intend to bring here. It means new investments in manufacturing and 21st-century infrastructure that 21st-century businesses need. We're modernizing ports, strengthening our bridges, making Internet and wireless and broadband far more accessible more quickly.

Now, that's my budget. I recognize there's something called Congress here, and we've got—[laughter]—there are going to be some negotiations taking place. So far, Republicans in Congress have put forward a different kind of budget. But I'm confident that we can find a way forward. I'm confident that we can find a path that doesn't undermine our standing, but strengthens it. Because the things that help businesses grow are not partisan. There shouldn't be anything partisan about making sure that our kids get the best education possible or that we've got world-class infrastructure.

We're working together on a bipartisan trade promotion authority and strong new trade deals from Asia to Europe that aren't just free but are also fair and reciprocal, trade deals that help businesses grow our exports and put American workers first. And I'm confident we can, together, reauthorize the Export-Import Bank of the United States, giving our businesses one more tool that they need to compete.

Today I'm pleased to announce a new action I'm also taking to make it easier for global companies who are present here today to launch and invest in the U.S. My administration is go-

ing to reform the L-1B visa category, which allows corporations to temporarily move workers from a foreign office to a U.S. office in a faster, simpler way. And this could benefit hundreds of thousands of nonimmigrant workers and their employers; that, in turn, will benefit our entire economy and spur additional investment.

Of course, as all of you know, one of the things that would make America even more attractive to businesses and that would grow our economy and shrink our deficits and keep this country safer, stronger, and smarter would be a comprehensive immigration reform package. And that's why I'm going to continue to push and prod and poke and cajole friends in the Republican Party to get on board and help us get this done. We need to get immigration reform done here in the United States of America. That's who we are.

So the bottom line is this: America is proudly open for business, and we want to make it as simple and as attractive for you to set up shop here as is possible. That is what this summit is all about. I hope you take full advantage of the opportunities that are here. This is a pretty good networking session. I can't even see the folks way out in the back. [Laughter] There is—there are a lot of deals to be done right here under this roof. And I hope that everybody is going to take full advantage of it.

Because we're committed to SelectUSA for the long haul. We are committed to building partnerships with you so that our companies and our communities can thrive together. And we intend to be with you not just today or tomorrow, but in the years and decades ahead.

That's my commitment to you. Because we are confident that if you invest in any of the communities that are represented here, what you will find is not only outstanding workers and not just outstanding infrastructure and not just an extraordinary market and not just cheap energy, but what you will find is that the American people like doing business and they respect business, and they're looking forward to working with you to make sure that your companies succeed, and that the faith that you place in those communities is ultimately going

to result in outstanding results for your company. All right?

Thank you very much, everybody. Good luck.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:39 p.m. at the Gaylord National Resort and Convention Center.

Memorandum on Expanding Broadband Deployment and Adoption by Addressing Regulatory Barriers and Encouraging Investment and Training March 23, 2015

Memorandum for the Heads of Executive Departments and Agencies

Subject: Expanding Broadband Deployment and Adoption by Addressing Regulatory Barriers and Encouraging Investment and Training

Access to high-speed broadband is no longer a luxury; it is a necessity for American families, businesses, and consumers.

Affordable, reliable access to high-speed broadband is critical to U.S. economic growth and competitiveness. High-speed broadband enables Americans to use the Internet in new ways, expands access to health services and education, increases the productivity of businesses, and drives innovation throughout the digital ecosystem. The private sector and Federal, State, and local governments have made substantial investments to expand broadband access in the United States, but more must be done to improve the availability and quality of high-speed broadband, particularly in areas lacking competitive choices.

Today, more than 50 million Americans cannot purchase a wired broadband connection at speeds the Federal Communications Commission has defined as the minimum for adequate broadband service, and only 29 percent of Americans can choose from more than one service provider at that speed. As a result, the costs, benefits, and availability of high-speed broadband Internet are not evenly distributed—with considerable variation among States and between urban and rural areas.

The Federal Government has an important role to play in developing coordinated policies to promote broadband deployment and adoption, including promoting best practices, breaking down regulatory barriers, and encouraging further investment. Doing so will

help deliver higher quality, lower cost broadband to more families, businesses, and communities and allow communities to benefit fully from those investments.

Therefore, by the authority vested in me as President by the Constitution and the laws of the United States of America, I hereby direct the following:

Section 1. Policy. It shall be the policy of the Federal Government for executive departments and agencies having statutory authorities applicable to broadband deployment (agencies) to use all available and appropriate authorities to: identify and address regulatory barriers that may unduly impede either wired broadband deployment or the infrastructure to augment wireless broadband deployment; encourage further public and private investment in broadband networks and services; promote the adoption and meaningful use of broadband technology; and otherwise encourage or support broadband deployment, competition, and adoption in ways that promote the public interest.

Agencies shall pay particular attention to opportunities to promote broadband adoption and competition through incentives to new entrants in the market for broadband services; modernizing regulations; accurately measuring real-time broadband availability and speeds; and other possible measures, including supporting State, local, and tribal governments interested in encouraging or investing in high-speed broadband networks.

Agencies shall also pay particular attention to increasing broadband access for underserved communities, including in rural areas, and to exploring opportunities to reduce costs for potential low-income users.

In so doing, agencies shall ensure: protection of existing and planned Federal, State,

local, and tribal government missions and capabilities for delivering services to the public, including those related to national security, public safety, and emergency response.

Agencies shall coordinate the activities discussed in this section through the Broadband Opportunity Council established in section 2 of this memorandum.

Sec. 2. Establishing the Broadband Opportunity Council. (a) There is established the Broadband Opportunity Council (Council), to be co-chaired by the Secretaries of Commerce and Agriculture, or their designees. In addition to the Co-Chairs, the Council shall include the heads, or their designees, of:

- (i) the Department of Defense;
 - (ii) the Department of State;
 - (iii) the Department of the Interior;
 - (iv) the Department of Labor;
 - (v) the Department of Health and Human Services;
 - (vi) the Department of Homeland Security;
 - (vii) the Department of Housing and Urban Development;
 - (viii) the Department of Justice;
 - (ix) the Department of Transportation;
 - (x) the Department of the Treasury;
 - (xi) the Department of Energy;
 - (xii) the Department of Education;
 - (xiii) the Department of Veterans Affairs;
 - (xiv) the Environmental Protection Agency;
 - (xv) the General Services Administration;
 - (xvi) the Small Business Administration;
 - (xvii) the Institute of Museum and Library Services;
 - (xviii) the National Science Foundation;
 - (xix) the Council on Environmental Quality;
 - (xx) the Office of Science and Technology Policy;
 - (xxi) the Office of Management and Budget;
 - (xxii) the Council of Economic Advisers;
 - (xxiii) the Domestic Policy Council;
 - (xxiv) the National Economic Council;
 - (xxv) the National Security Council staff;
- and

(xxvi) such other Federal agencies or entities as determined appropriate pursuant to subsection (c) of this section.

(b) The Council shall consult with other relevant agencies and with the Federal Communications Commission as appropriate. The Council shall also coordinate with existing Federal working groups and committees involved with broadband.

(c) The Director of the National Economic Council and the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy shall review, on a periodic basis, the membership of the Broadband Opportunity Council to ensure that it includes necessary Federal Government entities and that the Council is an effective mechanism for coordinating among agencies on the goals and policies outlined in this memorandum. The Director of the National Economic Council and the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy may add or remove members of the Council, as appropriate, based on that review.

Sec. 3. Functions of the Broadband Opportunity Council. (a) As permitted by law, the agencies as members of the Council shall consult with State, local, tribal, and territorial governments, as well as telecommunications companies, utilities, trade associations, philanthropic entities, policy experts, and other interested parties to identify and assess regulatory barriers and opportunities as outlined in section 1 of this memorandum to determine possible actions.

(b) Not later than 15 days from the date of this memorandum, each agency shall designate a representative to serve as the main point of contact and will notify the Co-Chairs of the Council of that designee.

(c) Not later than 60 days from the date of this memorandum, agencies shall submit to the Council a comprehensive survey of Federal programs, including the allocated funding amounts, that currently support or could reasonably be modified to support broadband deployment and adoption, as well as a survey of all agency-specific policies and rules with the direct or indirect effect of facilitating or regulating investment in or deployment of wired

and wireless broadband networks. Spectrum allocation decisions affecting broadband deployment and other policies related to spectrum allocation are excluded from this survey and from the work of the Council, and shall continue in accordance with the Presidential Memorandum of June 14, 2013 (Expanding America's Leadership in Wireless Innovation).

(d) Not later than 120 days from the date of this memorandum, agencies shall submit to the Council an initial list of actions that each of their agencies could take to identify and address regulatory barriers, incentivize investment, promote best practices, align funding decisions, and otherwise support wired broadband deployment and adoption.

(e) Not later than 150 days from the date of this memorandum, the Council shall report to the President, through the Director of the National Economic Council, a coordinated and agreed prioritized list of recommendations on actions that agencies can take to support broadband deployment and adoption. Such recommendations shall include a list of priority actions and rulemakings, as well as timelines to complete them. Before finalizing and submitting these recommendations, the full Council shall meet at least twice.

Sec. 4. General Provisions. (a) Nothing in this memorandum shall be construed to impair or otherwise affect:

- (i) the authority granted by law to a department or agency, or the head thereof;
- (ii) the functions of the Director of the Office of Management and Budget relating to budgetary, administrative, or legislative proposals; or
- (iii) the authority of the Federal Communications Commission concerning spectrum allocation decisions.

(b) Nothing in this memorandum shall be construed to require the disclosure of classified information, law enforcement sensitive information, or other information that must be protected in the interests of national security.

(c) This memorandum shall not require duplicate efforts underway in accordance with other Executive Orders and memorandums.

(d) This memorandum shall be implemented consistent with applicable law and subject to the availability of appropriations.

(e) Independent agencies are strongly encouraged to comply with the requirements of this memorandum.

(f) This memorandum is not intended to, and does not, create any right or benefit, substantive or procedural, enforceable at law or in equity by any party against the United States, its departments, agencies, or entities, its officers, employees, or agents, or any other person.

BARACK OBAMA

The President's News Conference With President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai of Afghanistan

March 24, 2015

Crash of Germanwings Flight 4U9525 Near Digne-les-Bains, France

President Obama. Good afternoon, everybody. Please have a seat. Before I begin, I want to say that our thoughts and our prayers are with our friends in Europe, especially the people of Germany and Spain, following a terrible airplane crash in France. It's particularly heart-breaking because it apparently includes the loss of so many children, some of them infants.

I called German Chancellor Merkel, and I hope to speak with President Rajoy of Spain later today, to express the condolences of the American people and to offer whatever assistance that we can as they investigate what has proven to be an awful tragedy. Our teams are in close contact, and we're working to confirm how many Americans may have been on board. Germany and Spain are among our strongest allies in the world, and our message to them is that, as their steadfast friend and

ally, America stands with them at this moment of sorrow.

Afghanistan-U.S. Relations

Now, it is a great pleasure to welcome President Ghani to the White House. As many of you know, President Ghani spent time here in the United States, as a student and as a scholar. He happened to go to Columbia University, where we both studied, and then spent time at the World Bank just down the street from here. And so his life reflects, in many ways, the friendship and mutual respect between Americans and Afghans. And in that spirit, Mr. President, I want to extend to you the warmest of welcomes.

President Ghani's presence here today, along with Chief Executive Abdullah, underscores Afghans'—Afghanistan's progress. In last year's election, millions of Afghans defied the threats from the Taliban and bravely cast their ballots. In the spirit of compromise and putting their interests behind the interests of the nation, President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah ensured the first peaceful and democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. And together, they now lead a national unity Government that reflects the diversity, the strength and the determination of the Afghan people.

Their Government signed the bilateral security agreement between our two countries, and on December 31, after more than 13 years, America's combat mission in Afghanistan came to a responsible end. Afghan forces now have full responsibility for security across their country. Some 330,000 Afghans serve in the police and security forces, and they are making extraordinary sacrifices, fighting and often dying for their country, and they continue to grow stronger month by month.

Today we honor the many Afghans—men, women, and children—who have given their lives for their country. We salute the more than 2,200 Americans, patriots who made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, and the many more who were wounded. This morning President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah visited Arlington National Cemetery to pay their respects to our

fallen heroes. We are grateful for that gesture of gratitude, and we know it meant a lot to the families as well. We'll see the bonds again between our people on display when President Ghani has an opportunity to address Congress tomorrow.

So with a new Government in Afghanistan and with the end of our combat mission, this visit is an opportunity to begin a new chapter between our two nations. President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, I thank you both for your strong support of the partnership between our two nations. And yesterday they had a chance to spend time at Camp David with our respective teams and had excellent discussions on how we can move forward together. Today, guided by our strategic partnership, we focused on several areas.

First, we agreed to continue to keep in place our close security cooperation. Afghanistan remains a very dangerous place, and insurgents still launch attacks, including cowardly suicide bombings against civilians. President Ghani is pursuing reforms to further strengthen Afghan security forces, including respect for human rights. And as part of the ongoing NATO mission, the United States will continue to train, advise, and assist Afghan security forces.

As we announced yesterday, we'll work with Congress on funding to sustain 352,000 Afghan police and troops through 2017. At the same time, we'll continue to conduct targeted counterterrorism operations, and we'll—we agreed to maintain a dialogue on our counterterrorism partnership in the years ahead.

Now, at our peak 4 years ago, the United States had more than 100,000 troops in Afghanistan. In support of today's narrow missions, we have just under 10,000 troops there. Last year, I announced a timeline for drawing down our forces further, and I've made it clear that we're determined to preserve the gains our troops have won. Now, President Ghani has requested some flexibility on our draw-down timelines. I've consulted with General Campbell in Afghanistan and my national security team, and I've decided that we will maintain our current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of this year.

The specific trajectory of the 2016 draw-down will be established later this year to enable our final consolidation to a Kabul-based Embassy presence by the end of 2016. Now, this flexibility reflects our reinvigorated partnership with Afghanistan, which is aimed at making Afghanistan secure and preventing it from being used to launch terrorist attacks. Reconciliation and a political settlement remain the surest way to achieve the full draw-down of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan in a way that safeguards international interests and peace in Afghanistan, as well as U.S. national security interests.

Second, and since the best way to ensure Afghanistan's progress is a political settlement, we're going to continue to support an Afghan-led reconciliation process. President Ghani, you've shown bold leadership in reaching out to Pakistan, which is critical to the pursuit of peace. Afghanistan and the United States agree on what the Taliban must do, which is break with Al Qaida, renounce violence, and abide by Afghan laws, including the protections for women and minorities.

Third, we'll continue to support the national unity Government in its efforts to truly serve the Afghan people. We discussed the urgent need, with Parliament's support, to seat a full Cabinet. President Ghani, in your Inaugural Address you spoke forcefully about the need to combat corruption, uphold rule of law, and strengthen democratic institutions, and the United States very much commends you for those efforts. And you moved many Afghans with your eloquent tribute to your wife and partner, First Lady Rula Ghani. America will continue to be your partner in advancing the rights and dignity of all Afghans, including women and girls.

And finally, we'll continue to support the development that underpins stability and improves the lives of the Afghan people. Over the years, there have been major gains: dramatic improvements in public health, life expectancy, literacy, including for millions of girls who are in school. President Ghani is a leading expert on development, and I've been impressed by the reforms that he's pursuing to make Af-

ghanistan more self-reliant. He wants to empower Afghans in these efforts, and that's why, under the new development partnership that we announced yesterday, U.S. economic assistance will increasingly go through Afghan institutions, in support of Afghan priorities, with an emphasis on accountability, performance, and achieving results.

In closing, I'd note that, as many of you know, President Ghani is, by training, an anthropologist, as was my mother. It's been said that "the purpose of anthropology is to make the world safe for human differences." Afghanistan, and our world, is marked by incredible diversity and differences of history and culture and faiths. But I believe that the progress that we've made in this visit will advance the goal for which so many of your citizens, Mr. President, have sacrificed over the years: the goal of making our two countries and the world safer.

President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah, thank you both for your leadership and your partnership. America's combat mission in Afghanistan may be over, but our commitment to the Afghanistan people, that will endure.

President Ghani.

President Ghani. [Inaudible]—President Obama, first of all, I'd like to express the deep sympathies of the Government and the people of Afghanistan to German and Spanish families and governments. Both of these countries took part in the ISAF coalition. They have made major commitments, and they have sacrificed in Afghanistan.

I'd like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to those common sacrifices and, simultaneously, take the opportunity to pay tribute to the 2,215 American service men and women who made—paid the ultimate sacrifice; more than 22,000 American soldiers who have been wounded in action; civilians, numerous contractors, and others. You stood shoulder to shoulder with us, and I'd like to say thank you.

I would also like to thank the American taxpayer for his and her hard-earned dollars that have enabled us. Yesterday, at the Pentagon, I saw a young girl; her name is Reese. And her father came out of retirement, out of reserve, to serve again in Afghanistan. She is sending a

care package every week to her father. And I want to thank her and the fathers of all other American children who are making sure that their parents are helping us and standing next to us.

Reese, I promised, now has 3 million Afghan sisters in school. And those sisters are dreaming of achievements that whatever career path, and hopefully, one day we'll see an Afghan woman President. It should not be soon—as not be too far, because we soon—we now have four women in the Cabinet. That's 20 percent of our Cabinet are women. I hope that some other countries will match us. [Laughter] That we are intent.

And thank you for the reference to Afghanistan's First Lady. She was delighted that—to have an opportunity to speak to Mrs. Obama. She has devoted her life to the most underprivileged of Afghans, and all of us are committed to make sure that 36 percent of Afghans that live below poverty will have—will live with dignity and one day, not in the distant future, see prosperity.

Dr. Abdullah and I are grateful for the reception that you've accorded us, Mr. President. Your national security team has gone out of its way to engage in intensive, comprehensive discussion, and both of us would like to thank Secretary Kerry for the loss of hours of sleep we caused you—[laughter]—and for your very able diplomacy and catalyzing the unity that today is on display. The Government of national unity is going to be an enduring phenomena, and both of us stand for the unity against the divisions that our opponents and enemies had hoped for.

This unity is a reflection of the desire of the Afghan public to overcome the last 200 years of our political history, where rarely public figures have chosen the country before themselves. We are committed in this regard to emulate the Founding Fathers and Mothers of the United States, where national interest would stand above personal or factional interests.

Afghans—I'm glad that the security transition is completed. You fulfilled your promise to your people, and we fulfilled our promise to our people. Afghans, for millennia, have guard-

ed our homeland and have a reputation for serving. The last years were an exception, when we needed help, and we're grateful that help was provided, but we are pleased that the security transition has been met according to the timeline that you set. Today, the combat role of the United States in Afghanistan is over.

But the train, advise, and assist mission is a vital part of our collective interests and collective endeavors. Tragedy brought us together; interests now unite us. And we can assure you that the Government of national unity has revitalized the partnership and looks at this partnership with the United States as foundational not just for Afghanistan's stability, but for regional and global stability.

Much binds us together, and the flexibility that has been provided for 2015 will be used to accelerate reforms, to ensure that the Afghan National Security Forces are much better led, equipped, trained, and are focused on their fundamental mission.

I'm pleased to say that the departure of 120,000 international troops has not brought about the security gap or the collapse that was often anticipated. I'd like to pay tribute at this moment to the continuous sacrifice of the Afghan security forces, civilians, and a patriotic nation.

Our patriotism is part of, simultaneously, our internationalism. We are unique in that we have embraced democratic ways. We are very proud of our Islamic civilization, but it is an Islam that is truly in dialogue with the world. And we have the capacity to speak truth to terror. They do not speak for Islam. We do. And it's the genuine Islam that is interested in dialogue between civilizations and cooperation and endeavor forward.

On regional cooperation, we have taken bold and novel steps; we do hope that these steps would be reciprocated, because the threats that exist, the changing ecology of terror, are making it imperative that all governments cooperate with each other.

Today, the state system as we have known it is under attack. These are not classic national liberation movements; these are destructive, nihilistic movements. And it's essential that we

confront them with vigor and determination. But we must differentiate between those and Afghan citizens who desire peace.

Any political difference, anything that divides us must be resolved politically, and we have shown the wisdom and determination that we can arrive at unity of purpose. So our commitment to peace is clear. What we require is reciprocity so that Afghan patriots will choose the country over themselves and unite in resolving whatever might be that divides us.

But we will not have peace with those who use our territory as a proxy for other purposes, as a battleground for alien forces, or as a launching pad for global terrorism.

This trip has provided us an opportunity to have a comprehensive overview, and I again want to express thank you for your commitment to submit a bill to Congress for support of our security forces 2017.

There's much work that lies ahead of us. And the flexibility that has been provided will be used to maximum effect to accelerate reforms to ensure that our security forces honor human rights; that they internalize the practices that binds an army, a police force, a secret service to the people. Violence against our people has no place within our security culture, and we will overcome those types of legacies.

It's again a pleasure to be standing next to a graduate of Columbia University. [Laughter] There's much that unites us. And your mother was an inspiration to us. I understand that the President of the World Bank actually got the job because she—he invoked your mother's teachings to convince you that an anthropologist could lead the World Bank. So thank you for according him that rare opportunity.

President Obama. He's doing a great job.

The—all right, with that, let's take a couple questions. Leo Shane, Military Times.

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. This is on, right?

President Obama. Yes, it's on. I can hear you.

U.S. Troop Levels in Afghanistan/U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan/U.S. Defense Spending

Q. With the increased slowdown in the drawdown here, we're looking at more risk, more danger for U.S. troops that are in Afghanistan. How do you justify that to them? How do you tell them that the mission is still worth it? And how do you assure them that there is an end coming to this mission?

And for President Ghani, you've talked the last couple days a lot about the sacrifice of U.S. troops. You were at Arlington earlier today. How do you tell them that this continued sacrifice will be worth it to them as well?

President Obama. Well, first of all, I think it's important, Leo, to remember the timeline for a withdrawal down to a Embassy-centered presence, a normalization of our presence in Afghanistan remains the end of 2016. So that hasn't changed. Our transition out of a combat role has not changed.

Now, I am the first to say that as long as our men and women in uniform are serving in Afghanistan, there are risks involved. It's a dangerous place. Casualties have come down precipitously as we've engaged in the drawdown. It's been over 90 days since two Americans were killed in Afghanistan. That has occurred precisely because we're not in a combat role. And I think it is worth noting the significant casualties that the Afghan security services have incurred. As we've drawn down, they've stood up, and they're fighting. And they're fighting with courage and tenacity, and they're getting better month by month.

But you can't minimize the sacrifices that our military families make. It means some folks are going to be rotating back into Afghanistan for a few extra months relative to what otherwise would have been the case. We're essentially moving the drawdown pace over to the right for several months, in part to compensate for the lengthy period it took for Government formation; in part because we want to make sure that we're doing everything we can to help Afghan security forces succeed so we don't have to go back, so we don't have to respond in an emergency because counterterrorist—or

because terrorist activities are being launched out of Afghanistan.

We're on the path to do that, and it was my assessment as Commander in Chief that it made sense for us to provide a few extra months for us to be able to help on things like logistics, making sure that equipment is not just in place, but it's also used properly; that the training and advising and strategic input that's been provided continues through this fighting season, in part so that President Karzai [Ghani], who has taken on the mantle of Commander in Chief in a way that we have not seen in the past from an Afghan President, can do a serious review and can assess here is where our strengths are, here's where our weaknesses are, and we can proceed with more effective joint planning going forward.

So the bottom line is, our men and women in uniform make enormous sacrifices. Their families do too; they serve alongside them. This will mean that there are going to be some of our folks who are in Afghanistan under the new schedule who would have been home. But it is important to keep in perspective, first of all, that we've gone down from 100,000 down to under 10,000; that they are not on the front lines because they're not in a combat role. We are doing all that we can do to make sure that force protection is a priority for those who are in Afghanistan. And the date for us to have completed our drawdown will not change.

But it is my judgment, it's the judgment of General Campbell and others who are on the ground, that providing this additional time-frame during this fighting season for us to be able to help the Afghan security forces succeed is well worth it. And in that sense, once again, we are asking our men and women in uniform to fight on behalf of our freedom and on behalf of a more orderly world.

It does, perhaps, raise one thought, which is, right now there's a debate going up on Capitol Hill about budgets. This would be a good time for my friends up on Capitol Hill, including on the other side of the aisle, to take a look at their budgets. If we're holding both our defense and

nondefense budgets to 2006 levels, it's a lot harder for us to do the job that we need to do not only on the national security side, but also here at home, making sure that when our men and women come home, and when they potentially go into civilian life, that they've got a strong economy, that their kids have good schools, that they can send their kids to college, that they get the veterans benefits that they have so richly earned and deserve. That would be a good way for us to express the thanks for the sacrifices they consistently make.

President Ghani. I met yesterday the widow of General Greene. She would like the memory of her husband to be preserved by a sustainable Afghanistan that is secure. The 2,215 Americans that have died must not die in vain. They must leave behind a legacy of a stable Afghanistan. And it's that preservation of those gains that I think inspires the American service men and women to obey the call of their commander, the order of their commanders.

Second, we have taken them out of the harm's way. As the President mentioned, for the past 100 days, because the combat role has ended, the exposure, the number of casualties is really down. There isn't—my most horrible reading of the day is my first, middle-of-the-day, and end-of-the-day security reports where I see the casualties of the Afghan figures. But thank God they're no longer American or European casualties.

John Campbell is making sure that they remain in support role. Their train, advise, assist role has risks, but they're nowhere comparable to combat role. And end of that combat role is very significant to this. And again, the institutional gains that would be achieved through the train, advise, and assist role is what will guarantee that the investments of the last 14 years pay off in terms of gains that would ensure.

Last point: Afghanistan is the front line. Because of American engagement in Afghanistan, there have not been attacks on mainland United States. But let's not forget that fortresses

* White House correction.

cannot be built around countries or continents. We are living in an interconnected world, and our security is joined together.

Afghanistan-U.S. Relations/U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan/Afghan Security Forces

Q. Thank you very much. Parwiz Kawa from Kabul-based—[inaudible]—Sobh daily newspaper. President Obama, you're talking about the long-term strategic partnership between Afghanistan and United States. At the same time, you're talking about deadlines about the withdrawal of the soldiers from Afghanistan. How do you ensure the long term—or how do you define the long-term strategy partnership after 2017, or from 2017 onward?

[At this point, the reporter spoke in Dari, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Q. Mr. President Ghani, I wanted to—what do you expect, Mr. President—what would the expectation coming to the United States and what would you like to return with to Afghanistan?

President Obama. Oh, no. Please.

[President Ghani spoke in Dari, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

President Ghani. Our expectations were that our cooperation will be enhanced and we will have a clear vision and practical vision for cooperation—for an enduring cooperation with the United States be there. And this change of environment has occurred, and today, the United States Government and—considers the Government of Afghanistan a really reliable partner.

Commitments that are made are considerable, and the funding proposal of supporting Afghan security forces by 2017 and it has reached to \$4.1 billion. It's nothing less—it's a significant issue, it's a very important issue.

And also, yesterday there was a new framework of our economic cooperation was laid out, according to which \$800 million were made—a commitment were made, those will be spent

through the Afghan budget. But most importantly is the flexibility that has been shown in the area of security cooperation. And this flexibility is going to ensure and provide confidence to our security forces and our people and also is going to send a very strong message to the region that this cooperation is not short term, but is enduring and long term.

President Obama. Our strategic partnership is based on a very simple principle. We want the Afghan people, through their security forces directed by their President and Commander in Chief, to be able to provide for their own security. And our goal is to make sure that we are a strong partner in helping to build and sustain effective Afghan security forces.

So, from the start, when I first came into office, we put additional U.S. troops, coalition troops, and resources into Afghanistan to shift momentum at a time when the Taliban and the enemies of peace and stability inside of Afghanistan, I think, were moving and had momentum.

We broke that momentum, elections took place, and the Afghan National Security Forces began to build up and get trained and become more and more effective. And because of a successful election and a national unity Government and the leadership of President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, we are now in a position where the Afghan security forces are not only more effective, but they're also better directed by the civilian Government.

We've been able to draw down and remove ourselves from a combat role, as doctor—as President Ghani indicated, without collapse, as was predicted. And Afghan soldiers have fought, and they've fought well. And obviously, there are still improvements to be made, but they're making significant progress.

So the strategic partnership involves us continuing to help support Afghan security forces. That means financially. The international community is going to have to continue to provide assistance to the Afghan Government, which is carrying a significant security load not only for itself, but for the region and, in some ways, the world. And we've made a commitment to do that.

We're going to continue to provide the kind of security cooperation and support that is required—training, assisting, advising, helping on logistics, helping on developing enabler capacity—all the things that go into a modern military, a professional military, a professional police force that can provide security on Afghan soil by Afghans.

And the cooperation and the strategic partnership involves building up the prosperity and opportunities for the Afghan people through the economic development that was mentioned by the President.

So we intend to be working with the Afghan Government and the Afghan people for a long time. And in many ways, our troop presence, our military assistance is just one component of what is a much larger process. And the more successful we are in building Afghan capacity and strengthening the Afghan economy, the more the strategic partnership that we have will be like the partnership that we have with many countries around the world. And it will be based on mutual interest and scientific and educational exchanges and business opportunities and commerce and trade. And that, I think, is the goal that we're all looking for.

Josh Lederman [Associated Press].

Iran/Arab-Israeli Peace Process/Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel/Israel-U.S. Relations

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. You've made very clear that you're not buying Prime Minister Netanyahu's attempts to walk back the comments that he made before the election, opposing Palestinian statehood and that you're reassessing your approach. What could Prime Minister Netanyahu do, if anything, in the short term to persuade you that he's serious about Israeli-Palestinian peace and that he's an honest broker that you could work with? Or is it too late to repair that relationship during your Presidency? And is there any truth to allegations that Israel was spying on the Iran talks?

And, President Ghani, if I may, you've been working very hard to pursue reconciliation talks with the Taliban, but there's some indications that that's not going so well and that they

may not be willing to sit down with you. What makes you hopeful that you can get those talks off the ground? And do you want the U.S. to be involved in those talks?

President Obama. Let me, first of all, address your second question about spying allegations. As a general rule, I don't comment on intelligence matters in a big room full of reporters. [Laughter] And I think I'll continue that tradition.

But with respect to the possibility of an agreement that ensures that Iran doesn't get a nuclear weapon, we have not just briefed Congress about the progress or lack thereof that's being made, but we also brief the Israelis and our other partners in the region and around the world. And if in fact an agreement is arrived at that we feel confident will prevent Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon, it's going to be there for everybody to see. And people are going to be able to lift up the hood and see what's in there.

So I have confidence that if there's an agreement, it's going to be a good agreement that's good for American security and Israeli security and the region's security. And if it isn't, then there probably won't be an agreement. So there will be, I think, significant transparency in the whole process.

With respect to Israel's relations with the Palestinians, I think it's important to understand that the issue here is not what I believe, but it's what the Palestinians and the parties in the negotiations and the Israeli people believe is possible. That's the most important issue. I've said before, and I'll simply repeat: Prime Minister Netanyahu, in the election runoff, stated that a Palestinian state would not occur while he was Prime Minister. And I took him at his word that that's what he meant, and I think that a lot of voters inside of Israel understood him to be saying that fairly unequivocally.

Afterwards, he pointed out that he didn't say "never," but that there would be a series of conditions in which a Palestinian state could potentially be created. But of course, the conditions were such that they would be impossible to meet anytime soon. So even if you accepted, I think, the corrective of Prime Minis-

ter Netanyahu's in subsequent days, there still does not appear to be a prospect of a meaningful framework established that would lead to a Palestinian state even if there were a whole range of conditions and security requirements that might be phased in over a long period of time, which it was always the presumption.

I don't think anybody ever envisioned in any peace agreement, certainly not one that Prime Minister Netanyahu would agree to or that the Israeli people would agree to, that overnight you suddenly have a Palestinian state right next to Jerusalem and that Israel would not have a whole range of security conditions that had to be met, and that it would be phased in over a long period of time.

So the issue has never been, do you create a Palestinian state overnight? The question is, do you create a process and a framework that gives the Palestinians hope, the possibility, that down the road, they have a secure state of their own, standing side by side with a secure, fully recognized Jewish State of Israel?

And I think—it's not just my estimation—I think it's hard to envision how that happens based on the Prime Minister's statements. And so when I said that we have to now do an evaluation of where we are, it's not in reference to our commitment to Israel's military edge in the region, Israel's security, our intelligence cooperation, our military cooperation. That continues unabated. And I will continue to do whatever I need to do to make sure that our friends in Israel are safe. That's what I've done since I've been President, and that's not going to stop. And so the Israeli people need to know that.

But I am required to evaluate honestly how we manage Israeli-Palestinian relations over the next several years. Because up until this point, the premise has been, both under Republican and Democratic administrations, that as difficult as it was, as challenging as it was, the possibility of two states living side by side in peace and security could marginalize more extreme elements, bring together folks at the center and with some common sense, and we could resolve what has been a vexing issue and one that is ultimately a threat to Israel as well.

And that possibility seems very dim. That may trigger, then, reactions by the Palestinians that, in turn, elicit counterreactions by the Israelis. And that could end up leading to a downward spiral of relations that will be dangerous for everybody and bad for everybody.

So bottom line, just to summarize here: Number one, our military and intelligence cooperation with Israel will continue unabated, unaffected, and we are absolutely committed to making sure that the Israeli people are safe, particularly from rocket attacks and terrorist attacks aimed on civilians.

Number two, that the evaluation that's taking place is specific to what happens between Israelis and Palestinians going forward. We'll continue to engage the Israeli Government as well as the Palestinians and ask them where they are interested in going and how do they see this issue being resolved. But what we can't do is pretend that there's a possibility of something that's not there. And we can't continue to premise our public diplomacy based on something that everybody knows is not going to happen at least in the next several years. That is something that we have to, for our own—for the sake of our own credibility, I think we have to be able to be honest about that.

And I guess one last point about this, because obviously, I've heard a lot of the commentary: There's a tendency, I think, in the reporting here to frame this somehow as a personal issue between myself and President—Prime Minister Netanyahu. And I understand why that's done, because when you frame it in those terms, the notion is, well, if we all just get along and everybody cools down, then somehow the problem goes away. I have a very businesslike relationship with the Prime Minister. I've met with him more than any other world leader. I talk to him all the time. He is representing his country's interests the way he thinks he needs to, and I'm doing the same.

So the issue is not a matter of relations between leaders; the issue is a very clear, substantive challenge. We believe that two states is the best path forward for Israel's security, for Palestinian aspirations, and for regional stability. That's our view, and that continues to be

our view. And Prime Minister Netanyahu has a different approach. And so this can't be reduced to a matter of somehow let's all hold hands and sing "Kumbaya." [Laughter] This is a matter of figuring out, how do we get through a real knotty policy difference that has great consequences for both countries and for the region? Okay?

Q. Will you consider supporting Palestinian statehood at the U.N.?

President Obama. We're going to do that evaluation. We're going to partly wait for an actual Israeli Government to form.

[President Ghani spoke in English as follows.]

President Ghani. Peace is our priority. Don't make premature judgments. [Laughter] And what we have asked from the United States, and President Obama has graciously supported it, is to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. And we are confident that this approach will bear the results in time. Peace is always difficult, and it requires focus, attention, and sacrifice, and that's what we are willing to do to bring it about. Mohmand—[inaudible].

U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan/Afghan Security Forces/Afghanistan-U.S. Relations

Q. Thank you very much. Mr. President, I've got a question to Mr. Obama. You just mentioned that Afghanistan is still a dangerous place. While it's a dangerous place, is it the right decision to draw down the force level at a time when it's a dangerous place and meanwhile Afghan forces are less equipped and they cannot fight truly?

[The reporter and President Ghani spoke in Pashto, and their remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

Q. Mr. President, my question is, the peace process—what was your initial—or your request from the United States President?

President Ghani. The United States has agreed to—with us that the peace process will be led by Afghans, and Afghans will be—will

continue this process, and it will be led by Afghans. And this is obvious for us, and we are thankful for the support.

President Obama. Afghanistan is still a dangerous place. The way it's going to become less dangerous is by Afghan security forces and Afghan police being capable of keeping law and order and security in the country. And that is not going to happen if foreign forces are continually relied upon for the basic security of Afghanistan.

So there are going to be specialized areas where we can cooperate, dealing with some of the most vicious terrorist networks. There's going to be intelligence cooperation and counterterrorism cooperation. And there are going to be specialized areas where we can provide logistical support and training and enabling support.

But the fact is, is that unless Afghan soldiers and Afghan police are able to maintain security, at some point, someday, the United States and other coalition forces would leave. And the good news is, what we've seen as we've removed ourselves from combat roles is the Afghan security forces have stepped up. And although they're certainly not as well equipped as coalition forces, they're better equipped than the Taliban. They're better equipped than the Haqqani network.

And so with the kind of leadership that President Ghani is showing as a Commander in Chief, with the leadership that's being shown by a growing cadre of military officers up and down the military chain, Afghan forces are proving themselves and discovering that, in fact, when they fight, they can be successful. And we want to stand with them in that process because we are very much invested in your success.

So, Mr. President, thank you for an outstanding visit.

President Ghani. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 2:30 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. John F. Campbell, USA, commander, Res-

olute Support and U.S. Forces–Afghanistan; and Jim Yong Kim, President, World Bank. President Ghani referred to Reese Larson, daughter of Lt. Cmdr. Lonn Larson, USN; and Susan My-

ers, wife of Maj. Gen. Harold J. Greene, USA, deputy commanding general, Combined Security Transition Command–Afghanistan, who was killed in Afghanistan on August 5, 2014.

Joint Statement by President Obama and President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai of Afghanistan

March 24, 2015

President Barack Obama welcomed Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, and the accompanying Afghan delegation to Washington from March 22–26, 2015.

The visit offered an opportunity to renew U.S.-Afghan relations, review the joint achievements of the last 13 years in Afghanistan, and to discuss the actions each country needs to take to ensure that the social, economic, security and human rights gains made over that period are sustained and advanced.

President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah expressed deep appreciation for the contributions, sacrifices and sustained commitment of the United States that made these achievements possible and underscored that this support is paying dividends for Afghans, Americans, and the international community alike. The Afghan economy has grown more than fourfold over the last 13 years and young Afghans are attending school at unprecedented levels, with girls and women comprising a growing percentage of these students.

The leaders further noted the success of joint counter-terrorism efforts to date and emphasized that sustained U.S. and other international assistance will be important to enable the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to address the significant security challenges facing Afghanistan and the wider region. President Obama and President Ghani reiterated their commitments under the U.S.-Afghanistan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and the U.S.-Afghanistan Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement (also known as the Bilateral Security Agreement, or BSA) to advance common ob-

jectives in these and other areas. The Presidents welcomed the decision of Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Rabbani made on March 23 at Camp David to meet again in Kabul this year to restart the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Commission meetings and to review progress in the implementation of the SPA.

Promoting Our Shared Democratic Values

President Obama commended President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and the Afghan people on the landmark 2014 presidential election resulting in the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. President Ghani noted that the broad based and inclusive National Unity Government that emerged from that election enjoys the full support of the Afghan people. President Obama welcomed the recent announcement of a slate of cabinet nominees. President Ghani reaffirmed the new Afghan government's commitment to maintaining and expanding the role of an independent, vibrant civil society and to protecting the human rights of all Afghans. President Obama encouraged a strong partnership between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah and welcomed the National Unity Government's goals of promoting security, economic growth, democracy and human rights, in particular the rights of women and minorities. President Obama further welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Afghan Special Commission for Electoral Reform envisioned in the September 2014 political framework as a means to further the national unity government's goals in this area and offered financial support for Afghan electoral operations and reform efforts.