

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.

*Advancing Long-Term Security and Strengthening the Peace Process*

President Ghani and President Obama reaffirmed their shared commitment, reflected in the SPA and BSA, to closely cooperate in preventing terrorists from ever again using Afghan soil to threaten Afghanistan, the region, or the world. President Obama hailed the successful completion of the security transition, the end of the NATO-led combat mission, and Afghan forces taking the lead on, and full responsibility for, security throughout Afghanistan. The leaders also acknowledged the important continuing role of NATO's new Resolute Support Mission in supporting the further development of the ANDSF's capabilities.

Both Presidents saluted the courage and growing capability of Afghan security forces, including their success in securing the elections last year. The leaders joined in paying their respects to the families of Afghan soldiers and civilians who have been killed or injured in the 13-year war. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah also offered condolences to the families of American soldiers and civilians who were killed and injured while serving in Afghanistan, and on behalf of the Afghan people, expressed gratitude to the American people for their sacrifices and continued support.

Both sides agreed on an early formation of the Joint Commission to oversee the implementation of the BSA and President Obama affirmed ongoing U.S. support for Afghan security forces. Based on President Ghani's request for flexibility in the U.S. draw down timeline, the U.S. will maintain its current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of 2015. The specific trajectory of the 2016 U.S. troop drawdown will be established later in 2015 to enable the U.S. troop consolidation to a Kabul-based embassy presence by the end of 2016. This flexibility reflects the re-invigorated 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 retro-

grade 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. Consistent with the principles of the SPA and BSA and as part of the broader bilateral security relationship, the two Presidents agreed to continue a dialogue on U.S. and Afghan counterterrorism (CT) objectives, to include the development of a joint CT partnership strategy through and beyond 2016.

While reaffirming their determination to cooperate against those who advocate violence and extremism, President Obama and President Ghani also stressed the need for an Afghan-led peace process, enjoying regional support, in particular from Pakistan, noting that as a part of the outcome of any such process, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups must end violence, break ties with international terrorist groups, and accept Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for the rights of women and minorities. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah emphasized their mutual and strong determination to advance a reconciliation process based on these principles. President Obama reaffirmed strong U.S. support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process and committed to make available additional financial support for the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) to facilitate the peaceful reintegration of former combatants into their local communities.

President Obama welcomed recent developments in Afghan-Pakistani relations. Both leaders emphasized the importance of continued efforts to advance Afghan-Pakistani dialogue aimed at building trust and producing tangible progress in the peace process, and improving the security situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region at large.

*Reinforcing Regional Security and Cooperation*

The leaders called on all countries in the region to support Afghanistan's security, stability and prosperity. Both presidents endorsed efforts to deepen the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and expressed appreciation to China for

hosting the October 2014 Heart of Asia summit and to Pakistan for hosting the next meeting later this year. President Obama welcomed steps by the National Unity Government to integrate Afghanistan more fully into the regional economy through various regional organizations, processes and programs and committed continued U.S. support for those efforts. President Ghani presented a development strategy built around regional connectivity, good governance, and investments for productivity. Central to this strategy is cooperation between Afghanistan and the region through trade, transit and investments. The two Presidents agreed to work to bring together like-minded countries to discuss Afghanistan and regional integration efforts at a high-level meeting on the margins of the 2015 United Nations General Assembly meeting.

#### *Fostering Social and Economic Development*

The leaders acknowledged the significant challenges Afghanistan is facing as it strives to overcome its current budgetary gap, and become increasingly economically and fiscally self-reliant. Emphasizing that economic reform is a central pillar of the National Unity Government's agenda, President Ghani briefed President Obama on specific steps the Afghan government is taking to combat corruption, increase transparency, reduce poverty and create jobs. President Ghani noted that in addition to many recent achievements, Afghanistan continues to face formidable challenges, including the need to root out corruption and strengthen good governance, build the foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, increase regional connectivity, and address illicit drug production in Afghanistan. In support of these efforts, President Obama and President Ghani announced a New Development Partnership that would focus up to \$800 million in U.S. economic assistance on urgent Afghan priorities tied to Afghan achievements of specific development results and implementation of key policy reforms. President Obama also welcomed the recent successful negotiation of an IMF Staff Monitored Program for Afghanistan. President

Ghani committed to take action on all necessary steps needed to implement this program.

Both Presidents further welcomed the decision to resume regular meetings of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Council and the agreement to expand capacity-building cooperation between the U.S. Treasury Department and relevant Afghan government agencies as set forth in the agreement signed by Treasury Secretary Lew and Finance Minister Hakimi on March 23 at Camp David.

President Obama and President Ghani agreed that Afghan prosperity depended on the development of the country's human capital. To this end President Ghani reiterated the Afghan government's determination to educate all Afghan boys and girls. President Obama expressed U.S. intent to provide sustained support for education in Afghanistan. Noting the significant impact that educational and cultural exchanges have had on Afghan and American society, and the U.S. commitment in the SPA to promote such programs, President Obama announced the U.S. intention to increase the number of Fulbright fellowships available to qualified Afghan students by 50 percent for the next five years, making this one of the largest Fulbright programs in the world. In addition, President Obama announced the establishment of an \$18 million USAID scholarship program to support women attending universities throughout Afghanistan. The two presidents also welcomed the decision of the Smithsonian Institution to host a major exhibition of contemporary Afghan handicrafts in 2016.

#### *Strengthening Afghan Institutions and Governance*

President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah outlined the National Unity Government's efforts to improve government performance, effectiveness, efficiency, and combat corruption. They also underscored the National Unity Government's commitment to upholding the rule of law and reforming the judiciary. They stressed that restoring Afghan people's confidence in justice institutions is a top priority for the Afghan government. President Obama and President Ghani agreed on the importance of cooperating to provide justice

sector personnel with the skills and qualifications needed to counter narcotics, ensure safe and humane corrections, expand legal education, protect the rights of women and girls, and provide other essential justice services.

### *Conclusion*

This visit constituted the first meeting among President Obama, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah since the inauguration of the National Unity Government last September and marked a pivotal moment in the U.S.-Af-

ghan partnership. Looking back, it was an opportunity to review the remarkable strategic, political and economic achievements of this partnership and the successful completion of the security transition in Afghanistan. Looking forward, both presidents endorsed a vision of a sustained relationship rooted in shared values, interests and sacrifices, bound by mutual commitments enshrined in the U.S.-Afghanistan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

## Memorandum on Disposal of Defense High-Level Radioactive Waste in a Separate Repository

March 24, 2015

### *Memorandum for the Secretary of Energy*

*Subject:* Disposal of Defense High-Level Radioactive Waste in a Separate Repository

Your memorandum and accompanying report of January 9, 2015, analyze the factors enumerated in section 8 of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act of 1982 (the “Act”) concerning disposal of high-level radioactive waste resulting from atomic energy defense activities, conclude that

a strong basis exists to find a separate repository is required pursuant to section 8 of the Act, and recommend that I make this finding.

In accordance with the Act, I find the development of a repository for the disposal of high-level radioactive waste resulting from atomic energy defense activities only is required.

BARACK OBAMA

## Remarks Commemorating the Fifth Anniversary of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act

March 25, 2015

Thank you. Good job. Keep up the good work. Thank you. Thank you so much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Thank you, Doctor, for that introduction. I want to thank Sylvia Burwell, our outstanding head of Health and Human Services. We’ve got some wonderful Members of Congress here today who helped make this happen. And I want to offer a heartfelt thanks to all of the top medical professionals who are here today. We’ve got hospital leaders, we’ve got health care CEOs, doctors, patients, advocates, consumer groups, Democrats and Republicans, who’ve all come together and spent

time and effort to make the Affordable Care Act, and America’s health care system, work even better.

What your efforts have meant is the start of a new phase, where professionals like you and organizations like yours come together in one new network with one big goal, and that is to continue to improve the cost and quality of health care in America.

A lot of you have already taken steps on your own. The American Cancer Society that’s represented here is committed to teaching its members about how new patient-centered approaches can improve cancer care. Governor

Markell of Delaware, who's here, has set a goal of having 80 percent of his citizens receive care through new and improved payment and delivery models within 5 years. And Dr. Glenn Madrid of Grand Junction, Colorado, is using a new care model that allowed him to hire case coordinators and use better technology so that patients have access to him 24/7. I don't know when that lets him sleep—[laughter]—but his patients are sleeping better.

And these are examples of efforts that show we don't need to reinvent the wheel; you're already figuring out what works to reduce infections in hospitals or help patients with complicated needs. What we have to do is to share these best practices, these good ideas, including new ways to pay for care so that we're rewarding quality. And that's what this network is all about.

In fact, just 5 years in, the Affordable Care Act has already helped improve the quality of health care across the board. A lot of the attention has been rightly focused on people's access to care, and that obviously was a huge motivator for us passing the Affordable Care Act: making sure that people who didn't have health insurance have the security of health insurance.

But what was also a central notion in the Affordable Care Act was, we had an inefficient system with a lot of waste that didn't also deliver the kind of quality that was needed, that often put health care providers in a box where they wanted to do better for their patients, but financial incentives were skewed the other way.

And so the work that we've been able to do is already spurring the kinds of changes that we had hoped for. It's helped reduce hospital re-admission rates dramatically. It's a major reason why we've seen 50,000 fewer preventable patient deaths in hospitals. And if you want to know what that means, ask Alicia Cole, who suffers—Alicia is right here—who suffers the long-term effects of a hospital-acquired infection. And she is here today because she doesn't want anybody else to endure what she has. And it's preventable if we set up good practices and

financial incentives, reimbursement incentives, are aligned with those best practices.

So making sure that the Affordable Care Act works as intended, to not only deliver access to care, but also to improve the quality of care and the cost of care, that's something that requires all of us to work together. That's part of what the law is all about. It's making health coverage more affordable and more effective for all of us. And in a lot of ways, it's working better than many of us, including me, anticipated. [Laughter]

Wherever you are, here's why you should care about making this system more efficient, and here's why you should care that we keep the Affordable Care Act in place. If you get insurance through your employer, like most Americans do, the ACA gave you new savings and new protections. If you've got a preexisting condition like diabetes or cancer, if you've had heartburn or a heart attack, this law means that you can no longer be charged more or denied coverage because of a preexisting condition—ever. It's the end of discrimination against the sick in America, and all of us are sick sometimes.

If you don't have health insurance, you can go online to the marketplace and choose from an array of quality, affordable private plans. Every Governor was given the option to expand Medicaid for his or her citizens, although only 28 have chosen to do so so far. But after 5 years of the ACA, more than 16 million uninsured Americans have gained health care coverage—16 million. In just over 1 year, the ranks of the uninsured have dropped by nearly one-third—one-third.

If you're a woman, you can no longer be charged more just for being a woman. And you know, there are a lot of women—[laughter]—like, more than 50 percent. [Laughter] Preventive care, like routine checkups and immunizations and contraception, now come with no additional out-of-pocket costs.

If you're a young person, you can now stay on your parent's plan until you turn 26. And if you want to turn that new idea into a business, if you're going to try different jobs, even a different career, you now have the freedom to do

it because you can buy health care that's portable and not tied to your employer. Most people have options that cost less than a hundred bucks a month.

If you're a business owner—because when we put forward the Affordable Care Act, there was a lot of question about how it would affect business—well, it turns out, employer premiums rose at a rate tied for the lowest on record. If premiums had kept growing at the rate we saw in the last decade, then either the average family premium, paid by the family or paid by the business, would be \$1,800 higher than it is today. That's 1,800 bucks that businesses can use to higher and invest, or that's 1,800 bucks that stays in that family's bank account, shows up in their paycheck.

If you're a senior, more than 9 million seniors and people with disabilities have saved an average of \$1,600 on their prescriptions, adding up to over \$15 billion in savings. There were fears promoted that somehow this was going to undermine Medicare. Well, it turns out, the life of the Medicare Trust Fund has been extended by 13 years since this law has passed.

And, relevant to the topic today, we're moving Medicare toward a payment model that rewards quality of care instead of quantity of care. We don't want the incentives to be skewed so that providers feel obliged to do more tests, we want them to do the right tests. We want them, perhaps, to save—to invest some money on the front end to prevent disease and not just on the back end to treat disease. And so these changes are encouraging doctors and hospitals to focus on getting better outcomes for their patients.

As we speak, Congress is working to fix the Medicare physician payment system. I've got my pen ready to sign a good, bipartisan bill, which would be really exciting. I love when Congress passes bipartisan bills—[laughter]—that I can sign. It's always very encouraging. And I want to thank everybody here today for their work in supporting new models of care that will benefit all Americans.

But the bottom line is this for the American people: The Affordable Care Act, this law, is

saving money for families and for businesses. This law is also saving lives, lives that touch all of us. It's working despite countless attempts to repeal, undermine, defund, and defame this law.

It's not the "job killer" that critics have warned about for 5 years. When this law was passed, our business—our businesses began the longest streak of private-sector job growth on record: 60 straight months, 5 straight years, 12 million new jobs.

It's not the fiscal disaster critics warned about for 5 years. Health care prices are rising at the slowest rate in nearly 50 years, which has helped cut our deficit by two-thirds since I took office. Before the ACA, health care was the single biggest driver driving up our projected deficits. Today, health care is the single biggest factor driving those projections down.

I mean, we have been promised a lot of things these past 5 years that didn't turn out to be the case: death panels, doom—[laughter]—a serious alternative from Republicans in Congress. [Laughter]

The budget they introduced last week would literally double the number of the uninsured in America. And in their defense, there are two reasons why coming up with their own alternative has proven to be difficult.

First, it's because the Affordable Care Act pretty much was their plan before I'd adopted it—[laughter]—based on conservative, market-based principles developed by the Heritage Foundation and supported by Republicans in Congress and deployed by a guy named Mitt Romney in Massachusetts to great effect. If they want to take credit for this law, they can. I am happy to share it. [Laughter]

And second, it's because health reform is really hard, and the people here who are in the trenches know that. Good people from both parties have tried and failed to get it done for 100 years, because every public policy has some tradeoffs, especially when it affects one-sixth of the American economy and applies to the very personal needs of every individual American.

And we've made our share of mistakes since we passed this law. But we also know beyond a

shred of a doubt that the policy has worked. Coverage is up. Cost growth is at a historic low. Deficits have been slashed. Lives have been saved. So if anybody wants to join us in the spirit of the people who have put aside differences to come here today and help make the law work even better, come on board.

On the other hand, for folks who are basing their entire political agenda on repealing the law, you've got to explain how kicking millions of families off their insurance is somehow going to make us more free. Or why forcing millions of families to pay thousands of dollars more will somehow make us more secure. Or why we should go back to the days when women paid more for coverage than men or a pre-existing condition locked so many of us out of insurance.

And if that's your argument, then you should meet somebody like Anne Ha, who is here. Anne is 28 years old. Where's Anne? There you are. Anne runs her own business in Philadelphia. And she thought what many of us think when we're young—I no longer qualify—[laughter]—that she was too young, too healthy to bother with health insurance. She went to the gym every day. She ate healthy, looks great, felt invincible. Why pay a doctor just to tell her she's okay?

But then her mom called, as moms sometimes do, and told Anne to get insured against the “what ifs” of life. What if you get sick? What if you get into a car accident? So Anne, dutiful daughter that she was, went to [healthcare.gov](http://healthcare.gov), checked out her options in the marketplace. And thanks to the tax credits available to her under this law, she got covered for 85 bucks a month. Four months later, Anne was diagnosed with early-stage stomach cancer. Anne underwent surgery, endured chemo. Today, she's recovering. She looks great. She's here with us at the White House. She invited me to her wedding. I told her you don't want the President at her wedding. [Laughter]

“If I didn't have insurance,” Anne wrote, “my stomach cancer would have gone undiscovered, slowly and silently killing me. But because I did have insurance, I was given a chance to live a long and happy life.”

And so in September, Anne is going to be marrying her fiancé Tom. And she's convinced him to get covered too. And I do appreciate, Michelle appreciates, the invitation. As I said, we have to mag people, if you—at the wedding, and it spoils the fun. [Laughter]

But here are two lessons from Anne's story. Number one, listen to your mom. [Laughter] Number two, the Affordable Care Act works. And it's working not just to make sure that folks like Anne get coverage, but it's also working to make sure that the system as a whole is providing better quality at a better price, freeing up our providers to do the things that led them to get into health care in the first place, and that's help people. It works.

Five years ago, we declared that in the United States of America, the security of quality, affordable health care was a privilege—was not a privilege, but a right. And today, we've got citizens all across the country, all of you here today who are helping make that right a reality for every American, regardless of your political beliefs or theirs. And we're saving money in the process. And we're cutting the deficit in the process. And we're helping businesses in their bottom lines in the process. We're making this country more competitive in the process.

And it's not going to happen overnight. There are still all kinds of bumps along the way. This is—health care is complicated stuff. And the hospital executives who are here and the doctors who are here and the consumer advocates who are here can tell you, all the complications and the quirks not just to the Affordable Care Act, but just generally making the system more rational and more efficient, it takes some time. But we're on our way. We're making progress.

And if all of us summon the same focus, the same kind of courage and wisdom and hard work that so many of you in this room display, and if we keep working not against one another, but for one another, with one another, we will not just make progress in health care. We're going to keep on making sure that across the board, we're living up to our highest ideals.

So I very much am appreciative of what all of you are doing. I'm very proud of you. And why don't you guys get back to work? [*Laughter*] Thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:42 a.m. in the South Court Auditorium of the Dwight D.

Eisenhower Executive Office Building. In his remarks, he referred to Nancy Beran, chief medical officer and internist, Westchester Health; Los Angeles, CA, resident Alicia Cole; and former Gov. W. Mitt Romney of Massachusetts.

## Remarks Following a Roundtable Discussion on Trade March 25, 2015

Well, as I said in the State of the Union Address earlier this year, my top priority is to make sure that we continue the economic momentum that's been established, continue to grow businesses, create jobs, and make sure that we've got the kind of prosperity that is broad based and allows people not just to get into the middle class, but ultimately, to start their own businesses, start their own industries, in some cases, climb out of difficult circumstances and live out the American Dream.

And one of the major components to do that is to make sure that outstanding goods and services made right here in the United States of America have access to global markets. Ninety-five percent of the customers of the world are outside our borders, and we've got to make sure that we're able to sell to them. And when we do, our companies thrive.

This is one of the reasons why I am pursuing the kind of trade authority that allows me, working with Members of Congress, to pry open these markets and make sure there's a level playing field that's good for American businesses and American workers.

We already have one of the most open markets in the world. People are already selling to us. But oftentimes, it's not reciprocal. And what I want to do is make sure that those markets are as open to us, our businesses, American workers, American products, as our markets are open to them.

And one of the reasons that I brought this group together is because the perception sometimes is, is that the trade agenda is only important for big companies, big corporations, big Fortune 500 or 100 companies. Well, the group that's sitting around here is made up of

small-businesspeople or medium-sized businesspeople who are seeing their businesses directly benefit from export, as well as a couple mayors, Mayor Nutter and Mayor Buckhorn, Philadelphia and Tampa, respectively, who can account for hundreds of thousands of jobs and tens of billions of dollars of sales coming out of their region as a consequence of exports.

So among the companies here, we've got companies that range from four employees to a couple hundred employees. Some are selling as much as 20 percent of their products and goods outside the United States; some are just getting started and are selling 7, 8, 10 percent of their goods outside the United States. In each case, what they know is that if the U.S. Government is getting their back, making sure that there's a level playing field, they can compete.

So I—just to tell one quick story: Jeff Hohman from Northwest Door makes big garage doors. And what he's finding is, is that when you have that stamp, "Made in America," on it, customers like that, they value it, and there's a ready market out there. And because he's been able to sell in places like Saudi Arabia and Australia, he's been able to hire more workers. Because his sales, traditionally, had gone down during the wintertime when people aren't thinking about buying a new garage door. They want to keep the one they've got closed. [*Laughter*] And so it was—there was a seasonal business cycle. Well, it turns out that when it's winter here, it's summer in Australia, and he's able to keep more folks on the job and, in fact, hire more people because of those sales and those opportunities.

Steve Basta with AlterG has created—or has a company that’s created new technologies for medical rehabilitation. He’s able to sell his products overseas, but what he’s finding is, in some countries, you’ve got tariffs that make his products more expensive, and that means fewer sales.

And so this is not just the Boeings and the General Electrics that benefit, although they do benefit, and they’ve got a lot of suppliers up and down the chain, so small and medium-sized businesses benefit when the big companies are selling, because they’re sourcing here in the United States. But it’s also small businesses and medium-sized businesses directly benefit.

And I want to make sure that that story gets told, because we’re going to make a big push to level the playing field. And I know that sometimes there’s controversy around trade agendas. Trade deals have not always been good for American manufacturing. There have been times where because the trade deal was one way, American workers didn’t benefit and somebody else did. Well, we intend to change that. We’re not going to sit and settle for the status quo.

And that’s why we’re going to make sure that the trade deals of the future reflect the labor protections, the environment protections,

the protection of property—or intellectual property that’s so important to our businesses. But we’re going to pry those markets open. I’m not going to settle for the status quo, because we think we can grow enormously.

And what we know is that people who export, their workers tend to get higher wages. Those businesses do better. And we want to make sure that “Made in America” is showing up in every country around the world. That’s our goal.

And I appreciate very much the mayors who are here who, as Michael Nutter said, doesn’t have time for a lot of abstract, ideological debates. What they know is, they want to make sure their businesses are able to access these markets.

You’ve got—Mayor Buckhorn has got the port in Tampa, which is the gateway for the entire southern part of our hemisphere. They know we’ve got to get this done. And so do these businesses as well.

So thank you very much, everybody. Appreciate it.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:36 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jeff Hohman, president, Northwest Door; and Steve Basta, chief executive officer, AlterG, Inc.

## Remarks at a Roundtable Discussion on Financial Regulatory Reform and Consumer Financial Protection at Lawson State Community College in Birmingham, Alabama *March 26, 2015*

Well, it’s wonderful to be here at Lawson State Community College. I want to thank Dr. Ward for his hospitality. We’re going to end up addressing a much larger crowd, but I wanted to take time while I was here to have a chance to talk to some people who are extraordinarily active here in Alabama around the issue of payday lending, title lending, and frankly, predatory lending.

Here in Alabama, like in many parts of the country, including my home city of Chicago, a lot of folks will come across some difficult

times. Occasionally, something happens, somebody gets sick in the family, although, now they’ve got the Affordable Care Act—[laughter]—hopefully, to fall back on. The car may break down at a bad time; a child may need something. And if things are tight—and many of these communities don’t have traditional banking services—too often, they get steered into payday loans.

And the challenge is that the interest rates that are so often charged on these short-term loans, they can be as high as 400 percent, 450

percent interest. It means that a \$500 loan might require \$1,000 in interest on top of the loan.

And I just was hearing a story from Stephen here about a family whose grandmother dies, and they take out a small loan for the funeral, aren't able to pay it back right away, lose their car, and two members of the family then lose their job, and the entire family's financial situation collapses. That's not who we are. That's not who we should be as a country.

And the good news is that the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau that was set up under Wall Street reform announced today that they're going to be initiating regulations to make sure that we're adhering to a basic principle, which is if we're going to have financial institutions provide loans to families and individuals, they've got to make sure that these individuals have the capacity to pay them back, that they're not going to be on the hook and burdened in perpetuity as a consequence of what was a short-term problem. We don't want that translated then into a long-term financial crisis for these families.

It's something that we know States around the country have been able to do, but unfortunately, too many States have not yet taken these steps. By having a Federal rule through the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, we're going to be able to make sure that more and more people get more protection. And in

the meantime, these outstanding folks who are sitting around the table are going to continue to push efforts at the State level to try to make progress.

And it's important to note that this is not a partisan issue. There are Republicans as well as Democrats who care deeply about this issue. There are members of the faith community who see a biblical injunction—[laughter]—in not engaging in usury and taking advantage of people at moments where they're most vulnerable. And so we very much appreciate both the Democrats and Republicans here in the State of Alabama who are promoting State-based solutions.

In the meantime, we're going to make sure that we continue to promote solutions at the Federal level as well. And I'm very proud of the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau for promulgating these rules. There's going to be a comment period. There's going to be a lengthy debate. But I'm going to be on the side of making sure that these rules are as strong as possible.

Okay? Thank you, very much. Did I miss anything? [Laughter] Thank you, people.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:14 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Perry W. Ward, president, Lawson State Community College; and Stephen Stetson, policy analyst, Arise Citizens' Policy Project.

## Remarks at Lawson State Community College in Birmingham March 26, 2015

*The President.* Hello, Alabama! Hello, Lawson State Community College! Well, it's good to be here. Thank you so much.

*Audience member.* We love you, Mr. President!

*The President.* I love you back! I do! Thank you. Everybody, have a seat. Have a seat. I'm going to talk for a second. Can everybody—everybody, please give Ollie a big round of applause, please. I felt a little bad because Ollie said "a man who needs no introduction," so I started walking out. [Laughter] Then, it turned

out, she had a little introduction. [Laughter] But it is wonderful to be here.

Let me just say, first of all, thank you to Dr. Ward, who is not only your president; we named him a White House "Champion of Change" for the very great work he's done here at Lawson State. We've got two outstanding public servants here as well. Congresswoman Terri Sewell is here. Where's Terri? I don't even see her.

*Audience member.* Over here!

*The President.* There she is. She's way over there. And your mayor, William Bell, is in the house.

So I'm here, Birmingham, to just acknowledge that I didn't have UAB making it out of the first round. [Laughter]

*Audience members.* Oooh! [Laughter]

*The President.* My bracket is so busted. [Laughter] But, UAB, that's a great accomplishment. I want to congratulate them. It's also great to be with students like those here at Lawson State, at community colleges. I'm proud of all of you. I'm proud of you making this investment in yourselves. What you're doing takes effort and persistence. And it takes faith in the idea that no matter how you started, no matter where you come from, no matter what ZIP Code you were born in, in America, if you work hard, you can get ahead.

I think it was yesterday I saw a story where someone said that a visit from the President is a "potential game changer" for the neighborhood. I don't know if just one visit is a game changer, but it's nice to be with you. The real game changers for any neighborhood, for any community, are the people there, the folks who, day in, day out, are doing the work and raising families and participating in the community through their churches and faith institutions, are trying to provide that optimism and that lift.

And the young people who are here, you're the game changers, because what you're studying and your ability to then apply that learning, that's going to make a difference. The love we put into our families and our communities every day and embracing the joys of citizenship and participation, that's what is a game changer. That's what makes a difference.

Now, I won't deny, I can help a little bit. [Laughter] I can maybe make a little bit of difference. And today I want to talk about what we can do as a country to reward hard work and keep the economy growing and make sure that new jobs and opportunities exist.

The good news is, right now we're on a 60-month streak of private sector job creation. Sixty months, so that's 5 years. That's a long time. We've created 12 million new jobs. Nationwide, the unemployment rate has fallen. When I came into office, that first year it was

10 percent; now it's 5.5 percent. There are more job openings than at any time since 2001.

Meanwhile, our high school graduation rate is up, at an alltime high. More than 16 million Americans have gained the security of health insurance. We're producing more energy than ever before: oil and gas, but also wind power and solar power. And meanwhile, lower gas prices should save the typical family this year about \$700 at the pump. And the good news is, wages are even on the rise again, and that's going to help a lot of families.

So it's been a long, hard road. But thanks to the hard work of the American people, America is coming back. So the question now is, where do we go from here? Do we accept an economy where just a few people do really, really well? Or are we going to keep building an economy that generates opportunity for everybody who's willing to work?

And what I believe is, is that America does best when the middle class does better. And when ordinary folks who maybe were born into poverty are able to climb their way into the middle class, that's good for everybody. The economy grows best not from the top down, but from the bottom up and from the middle out.

So what we've been pushing is what I call middle class economics, the idea that the country does best when everybody has got a fair shot, and everybody is doing their fair share, everybody is playing by the same rules. And we want not only everybody to share in America's success, but contribute to it, because we know that if you field the team and only half the folks get to play, that team will be less successful. If everybody is playing a part, that team is going to be more successful.

So what does middle class economics mean in this new economy? It means that every American has to have the tools to get ahead in a fast-paced, constantly changing global economy. That means that we've got to make sure that working families feel more secure; that their paychecks can go a little farther; that they're getting things like paid leave and child-care not as luxuries, but because they help

support families; that we treat those things as priorities for working moms and working dads.

It's time to follow the example of States and cities and companies that are raising America's minimum wage. That will make a difference. It means preparing Americans to earn good jobs and higher wages, which means every child getting a great education at the earliest age. Making college more affordable so young people can afford to go to college without getting burdened with debt.

It means working with businesses to provide apprenticeships and on-the-job training and other paths into the middle class. And I want to bring down the cost of community college to zero. Two years of community college should be as free and universal as high school is today. If we've got the best trained workforce in the world, then businesses will come to Alabama. They'll come to Birmingham. They'll come to America. And we will succeed.

Middle class economics means building the most competitive economy anywhere so we can keep churning out high-wage jobs for the workers to fill. I want to put more people back to work rebuilding our roads and our bridges, modern ports, faster trains, faster Internet. We should invest in those things. They pay off many times over.

I want to invest in basic research so that jobs and industries of the future take root here because we've invented new products and new services and innovated. And we can pay for these investments without blowing up our deficits. We just need to reform our Tax Code so it helps middle class families get ahead instead of letting folks who've already got a lot get ahead.

And I have to say, these ideas are not about ideology. The reason I've proposed these ideas is because we know they work.

Now, let me talk about Washington for a second. [Laughter] Let me just talk about Washington for a second. The good news is that today the House of Representatives passed a bill. [Laughter] No, no. I—you think I'm joking. I'm not. [Laughter] It was a bipartisan bill designed to make sure that doctors in our Medicare system get paid on time, that the

Children's Health Insurance Program continues to work.

I called the Speaker, John Boehner, and the Democratic leader, Nancy Pelosi, and I said, congratulations, this is how Congress is supposed to work. They came together; they compromised. They had a good idea. They didn't get everything they wanted. They passed a bill. Now the Senate, hopefully, will pass the bill, and I'll get to sign it, and the American people will be better off for it. And I thought, this is great. Let's do more of this. Let's make it happen.

I—so I want to give John Boehner and Nancy Pelosi credit. They did good work today. And they deserve credit, and the House of Representatives deserves credit for that.

So that was the good news. [Laughter] The bad news—[laughter]—is the Republicans in Congress unveiled their budget, and it represents the opposite of middle class economics, because it would hand out new tax cuts for millionaires and billionaires, let taxes go up for students and working families because it would eliminate their tax credits on a variety of things. It would cut investments in education to the lowest level since the year 2000. It would double the number of Americans without health insurance.

And so you look at it and you say, what are you trying to solve with this budget? They say the reason they wanted this budget is because we've got to do this to eliminate deficits and debt. Now, keep in mind, the deficit has come down by two-thirds since I've been President. It's come down by two-thirds. So—and the budget I put forward would continue to keep deficits low.

But let's take them at their word. They said they wanted to reduce the deficit. Before the ink was even dry on the budget that they put forward—that was already full of tax cuts for folks at the top—they rolled out their next big economic plan, which was another huge tax cut for folks at the top. This one would cost \$250 billion. It would apply only to the top one-tenth of 1 percent of Americans.

In Alabama, this new tax cut they're proposing—[laughter]—I've got to laugh because it

would average \$2 million per person in tax cuts, and it would apply to less than 50 people per year here in Alabama.

*Audience members.* Oooh!

*The President.* So 50 people would get an average tax break of \$2 million. Not 50,000 people—50.

*Audience member.* “Fiddy.”

*The President.* “Fiddy.” [Laughter]

Now—[laughter]—what would lead you—when you’re saying you’re concerned about the deficits, what would lead you to put in your budget and then propose right after your budget something like that? I mean, did they look at the budget? They already got tax cuts for the wealthy, for millionaires and billionaires, and then they say, you know what we forgot to put in here? Another deficit-busting tax cut for the top one-tenth of 1 percent of Americans. That’s what’s really going to move the country forward. Is that what they were thinking? I guess. [Laughter]

I don’t think our top economic priority should be helping a tiny number of Americans who are already doing really, really well, and then asking everybody else to foot the bill. And keep in mind, I—one of the things about being President, you meet people from all walks of life. You meet folks with very modest incomes. You meet the wealthiest people in the world. And let me just say, some of the—these folks at the very top, the top one-tenth of 1 percent, are wonderful people. Warren Buffett is a great friend of mine. They’ve done amazing things. They’ve invested. They’ve created businesses. They deserve great success. But they really don’t need a tax cut. [Laughter]

And if you talk to them, they’ll tell you: “I’ve already got a couple planes. I’ve already got a boat.” [Laughter] “I’ve already got five or six houses. I’m okay.” [Laughter] And the idea that you would do it at the same time as you’re eliminating tax credits for students or working families—that doesn’t make sense.

Our top priority should be helping everybody who works hard get ahead. It doesn’t mean everybody is going to be equal. It doesn’t mean that we’re going to punish people who have started businesses and taken risks. They

should be rewarded. But we want to make sure everybody has a chance to do okay if they’re working hard.

And that brings me to one of the main reasons that I’m here in Birmingham today. One of the main ways to make sure paychecks to go farther is to make sure working families don’t get ripped off. [Applause] Right? And that’s why we’ve taken action to protect Americans from financial advisers who don’t necessarily have the interests of their clients at heart. That’s why we’ve taken steps to protect student borrowers from unaffordable debt. We want them to know before they owe. [Laughter]

It’s why, 5 years ago, we passed historic Wall Street reform to end this era of “too big to fail,” where banks on Wall Street, some of them would make reckless bets, and then everybody else would have to clean up after them. And why we’ve been working to protect people so that they understand mortgages and they don’t buy homes they can’t afford and end up in a situation not only hurting themselves, but hurting the financial system.

And that’s why, as part of this reform, we created an independent consumer watchdog with just one mission, and that is to look out for all of you. And it’s called the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, or CFPB. Now, these folks, the CFPB, it hasn’t been around a long time, but because of the work they’ve done—it’s not a big agency, but they’ve already put over \$5 billion back into the pockets of more than 15 million families. Because they’ve taken on unfair lending practices and unscrupulous mortgage brokers. And they’ve gotten refunds for folks and are working with State and local officials to make sure that people are protected when it comes to their finances. Because if you work hard, you shouldn’t be taken advantage of.

And today they’re taking new steps towards cracking down on some of the most abusive practices involving payday loans and title loans.

Now, Ollie was talking about this in a very personal way. I want to just break this down for folks. Every year, millions of Americans take out these payday loans. Here in Alabama, there are four times as many payday lending stores as there are McDonald’s. Think about that.

Because there are a lot of McDonald's. [Laughter] There are four times as many payday loan operations here in Alabama as there are McDonald's.

Now, what they'll say, the folks who run these things—in theory, what they'll say is these loans help you deal with a one-time expense. So your car breaks down, you got to get to work; you go there, cash a check real quick or get a quick loan, and then that's the end of it. In reality, most payday loans aren't taken out for one-time expenses. They're taken out to pay for previous loans. You borrow money to pay for the money you already borrowed.

As Ollie will tell you, before you know it, you find yourselves trapped in a cycle of debt. At first, it seems like easy money. But the average borrower ends up spending about 200 days out of the year in debt. You take out a \$500 loan at the rates that they're charging in these payday loans—some cases, 450 percent interest—you wind up paying more than \$1,000 in interest and fees on the \$500 that you borrowed.

We were hearing a story from some of the advocates who were working here in Alabama, a story about a family, the grandmother died, matriarch of the family. She passed away. They don't have quite enough to pay for the funeral. They go to a payday loan, borrow for the funeral, can't pay back the loan in time. The family's car gets taken away. And the two folks who are the breadwinners in that family lose their jobs because they can't get to work. Right? So what started off as a short-term emergency suddenly becomes a catastrophic financial situation for that family.

And you don't need to be a math genius to know that it's a pretty bad deal if you're borrowing \$500 and you have to pay back \$1,000 in interest. [Laughter]

So I just met with faith leaders and consumer advocates and civil rights leaders here in Alabama who are coming together to change that. And I want to say that this is a bipartisan effort. You've got some very conservative folks here in Alabama who recognize—they're reading their Bible, they're saying, well, that ain't right. [Laughter] Right? I mean, they—they're saying the Bible is not wild about somebody

charging \$1,000 worth of interest on a \$500 loan. Because it feels like you're taking advantage of somebody. If you're lending to somebody, knowing they can't pay you back, and you're going to put them on the hook and just squeeze them harder and harder and harder and take more and more money out of them, you're taking advantage of them.

And so I'm very proud of the bipartisan effort here in Alabama to try to change this. But I want everybody to know, they're not going to have to fight alone. Because at the Federal level, the Consumer Finance Protection Bureau, the CFPB, announced today that it's going to take important steps towards protecting consumers from getting stuck into these cycles of debt.

And the idea is pretty common sense: If you lend out money, you have to first make sure that the borrower can afford to pay it back. Don't lend somebody money if you know they can't pay it back.

As Americans, we don't mind seeing folks make a profit. And if somebody lends you money, then you—we expect you to charge interest on that loan. But if you're making that profit by trapping hard-working Americans into a vicious cycle of debt, you've got to find a new business model. You've got to find a new way of doing business.

So this is just one more way that America's new consumer watchdog is making sure more of your paycheck stays in your pocket. And in the meantime, we're also going to be working to educate folks on how to think about their money.

We were talking to Dr. Ward, and through the community college process, through consumer advocates at the local level, in the high schools, we need to be teaching young people the dangers of taking out too much consumer debt.

And this is one more way that Wall Street reform—what we passed 5 years ago—is protecting working families and taxpayers. And that strengthens the economy.

And that's one more reason why it makes no sense that the Republican budget would make it harder for the CFPB to do its job and would

allow Wall Street to go back to the kind of recklessness that led to the crisis in the first place and would allow these kinds of lenders who are not doing the right thing keep at it.

I have to be clear: If Republicans in Congress send me a bill that unravels the reforms we've put in place, if they send me a bill that unravels Wall Street reform, I will veto it. And this is not about politics. It's about basic values of honesty and fair play. It's about the basic bargain that says, here in America, hard work should pay off, responsibility should be rewarded.

One of the people who I met with was Reverend Shannon Webster of Birmingham's First Presbyterian Church. Where's pastor? He's here somewhere. There he is, in the back. Stand up so everybody can see you. So Pastor Webster is one of the pastors leading the effort to protect consumers here in Alabama. And at a public hearing a few years ago, he explained why he decided to work on this issue. "When our people are trapped in debt," he said, "they cannot escape, and we're all hurt." We're all hurt. And that's a simple statement, but it captures so much of what it means to be an American.

We are a country of rugged individuals. We don't expect folks to give us a handout. We expect people to work hard. We expect that hard work to be rewarded. If you're out there and you're working hard and starting a business and doing the right thing and looking after your family and not spending beyond your means, we—folks like that shouldn't be pun-

ished or expected to pay for everybody else. We expect everybody to be responsible.

But we're also our brother's keeper. We're also our sister's keeper. We're also a country that was built on the idea that everybody gets a fair shot and that we put laws in place to make sure that folks aren't taken advantage of. When this country does not live up to its promise of fairness and opportunity for all people, we're all hurt. When we do live up to those promises, all of us are better off.

Back in 2008, I came to Birmingham as a candidate for this office, and I said, "There is nothing we cannot do if the American people decide it's time." Seven years later, I still believe there is nothing we cannot do if we decide it is time. We're all in this thing together, Alabama. We've been through some tough times together, but we're coming back together. If we decide this is our time, then together, we're going to write the next great chapter in this country's history. We're going to do it not just because I came to town, but because of the wonderful people in this town who are already making it happen.

Thank you, Alabama. God bless you. God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:27 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Ollie Parham, economic development chair, Alabama National Association for the Advancement of Colored People; Adam Ganucheau, reporter, Birmingham News; and Warren E. Buffett, chief executive officer and chairman, Berkshire Hathaway Inc. He also referred to H.R. 2.

## Remarks During a Meeting With Members of the President's Council of Advisers on Science and Technology *March 27, 2015*

I'm having an opportunity to meet with my science and technology advisory group, which has—works on an ongoing basis on a whole range of technology and science and research issues. And we're joined by a couple of Cabinet members, Secretary Burwell and Secretary Vilsack.

The reason I called you guys in here today before the meeting is, I wanted to talk about an

issue that is of great importance to America's public health and the world's public health, and that is some of the problems that we're having in antibiotics becoming less effective and the need for us to deal with these drug-resistant bacteria.

This is a major public health issue. Some of you may have been reading and hearing