

You want to say something?

*Coach Kerr.* Thank you. I'm actually—I'm a little thirsty. Is that my water or yours? [Laughter]

*The President.* It is. Go for it.

*Coach Kerr.* I thought maybe it was yours. [Laughter] I'm guessing it's yours.

I want to say thank you. I also want to say congratulations for becoming the first President in our Nation's great history to use the term "clowning." So—[laughter].

*The President.* I'm proud of that.

*Coach Kerr.* Although maybe Teddy Roosevelt used it somewhere in there, I don't know. [Laughter] But we want to thank you. Our organization is so honored to be here, to meet you, to tour the White House, and to celebrate our championship with you here.

Our general manager, Bob Myers, who you met earlier, also mentioned to me that you're going to be a free agent at the end of this year. [Laughter] So we don't know if you have anything lined up yet, but—

*The President.* I'm ready to go.

[At this point, Coach Kerr presented the President with a team jersey.]

*Coach Kerr.* You can consider this a symbol of an offer that's coming. We want you—as soon as your duties are done here in the White House, we'd like you to be the leader of Dub Nation.

*The President.* Forty-four!

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:02 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Harrison B.J. Barnes, forward, Luke T. Walton, assistant coach, Andrew M. Bogut and Draymond J. Green, centers, Klay A. Thompson, W. Stephen Curry II, and Andre T. Iguodala, guards, and David Lee, former forward, Golden State Warriors; Riley Curry, daughter of Mr. Curry; Mayor Elizabeth B. "Libby" Schaaf of Oakland, CA; Monty Williams, assistant coach, Oklahoma City Thunder, in his former capacity as head coach of the New Orleans Pelicans; and LeBron R. James, forward, Cleveland Cavaliers.

## Remarks at a Plan Colombia Reception With President Juan Manuel Santos Calderon of Colombia

February 4, 2016

*President Obama.* Well, good evening, *Bienvenidos a la Casa Blanca*. [Laughter] Thank you all for being here as we reaffirm a great partnership between the United States and Colombia and as we celebrate a decade and a half of progress under Plan Colombia. It's a great honor to welcome my good friend, President Santos; the First Lady, Mrs. Rodriguez de Santos; their outstanding sons, who are—one is at UVA, and he reminded me that the basketball team there is better than the Kansas Jayhawks, his father's alma mater. [Laughter]

I want to recognize former President Pastrana. We are honored to have you here, as well. And I want to thank all the leaders, all the Members of Congress who have been critical to this partnership over many years. It's been a bipartisan effort of support—Democrats and Republicans, business leaders, faith communi-

ties, civil society, our military that has done outstanding work. And I especially want to recognize someone who's played a vital role in the peace process—that's our Special Envoy, Bernie Aronson. So thank you, Bernie, for the good work that you're doing.

In the United States, we are big fans of Colombia. [Laughter] We love its culture, we love its contributions. We love Shakira. [Laughter] Carlos Vives. Sofia Vergara. I really—you know—[laughter]. We're joined by many friends from Colombia. We have a lot of proud Colombian Americans. And that includes some of the great talents who are here tonight. We've got actors like John Leguizamo. Where's John? Right there. And Juan Pablo Montoya. There he is. Former shortstop for my beloved Chicago White Sox, Orlando Cabrera. There you go.

So the bonds between our countries are not just at the level of government. They're people. They're cultures and friendships and family. And reflective of that, President Santos and I just had another very productive meeting. This is one of the strongest partnerships in the hemisphere, and increasingly, we're global partners. It's a partnership grounded in mutual interests and mutual respect. And Juan Manuel and I discussed ways that we can continue to strengthen our ties with more trade, more investment in clean energy, ever deeper cooperation in the region.

Of course, much of our work focused on how to seize this incredible moment of promise in Colombia. We all remember a time, not long ago, when Colombia was torn apart by terrible violence, plagued by insurgency and civil war. Many of you who are here lived through those times. Some of you here lost loved ones or friends, colleagues.

And that's why the United States and Colombia forged what became Plan Colombia, starting with President Pastrana and transcending administrations in both of our countries. We were proud to support Colombia and its people as you strengthened your security forces, as you reformed land laws, and bolstered democratic institutions. So Plan Colombia has been a tribute to the people of Colombia and their efforts to overcome so many challenges. And after 15 years of sacrifice and determination, a tipping point has been reached. The tide has turned.

As President Santos would be first to tell you, obviously, serious challenges remain. But from Cartagena to the *campo*, there's no denying Colombia's remarkable transformation. Today's Colombia is a country of artists and entrepreneurs and dynamic cities. In the barrios of Medellin, new businesses, along with giant outdoor escalators up the hillsides, are literally lifting people out of poverty. Children who once hid in fear now have the chance to pursue their dreams. In short, a country that was on the brink of collapse is now on the brink of peace. I had the privilege of seeing some of this extraordinary change myself when I visited

Cartagena. I still believe what I said then: In Colombia today, there is hope.

Now, fully realizing that hope requires a just and lasting peace. So, President Santos, I've said to you privately—I want to reiterate publicly how much I admire the great courage and resolve that you've shown in pursuing negotiations to end the war. You've committed to an agreement that upholds Colombia's national and international legal obligations, and you've put victims at the center of this process. I want to thank all of the parties for their efforts, including the Government of Cuba for hosting the talks. We all know that it's easier to start wars than end them. But after a half a century of wrenching conflict, the time has come for peace. It's time to make real the words of the young Colombian who said, "The only thing I want to see die over here in the west side of town is the Sun at the end of the day." [*Laughter*]

Of course, peace will just be the first step. Any agreement will have to be implemented. And just as the United States has been Colombia's partner in a time of war, I indicated to President Santos we will be your partner in waging peace. So today I'm proud to announce a new framework for the next chapter of our partnership. And we're going to call it Peace Colombia—*Paz Colombia*.

So, as Colombia transitions to peace, the United States will work with you, hand in hand. I'm proposing that more than \$450 million be devoted to helping to reinforce security gains, reintegrate former combatants into society, and extend opportunity and the rule of law into areas denied them for decades. We will continue to stand for human rights and justice for victims, and we will keep working to protect our people, as well as the Colombian people, from the ravages of illegal drugs and the violence of drug traffickers.

As part of our global demining efforts, the United States intends to support Colombia as it works to remove every landmine in the country within 5 years. That's our goal. And Secretary Kerry will lead this effort. I want to thank our partner, Norway, and we invite others to join in this really important work so that every

Colombian child can walk into a brighter future free of fear.

I can't emphasize enough how this is a concrete manifestation that we can achieve in a relatively short timeframe that not only ensures that innocents are not injured or killed, but it also means that land that may have been very difficult to develop or to farm now is available. And we're very proud to be part of that effort.

And I indicated to President Santos that as the negotiations conclude—assuming success, assuming an embrace by the Colombian people—we will continue to solicit ideas from your Government and the Colombian people about how else we can help and mobilize the international community to support your efforts.

But the point is, is that because of the vision and leadership of not only the Colombian people and Colombian Government, but also Democrats and Republicans and Members of Congress and so many who invested so much in this effort many years ago, we want to make sure that we are showing that same commitment going forward. We don't consider this an end to our friendship and our partnership, but rather a new beginning.

And just as we did 15 years ago, we intend to bet on Colombia's success. We're united by a common vision: a future that is more just and more equitable, more prosperous for all of our people. One of my most memorable experiences in Colombia was when I accompanied President Santos as he granted land title to two Afro-Colombian communities. And it was a wonderful day, not just because we were hanging out with Shakira. [Laughter] There, in the Plaza de San Pedro, we watched as the descendants of slaves laid claim to their piece of a new Colombia. And it was a reminder of what peace really means in people's daily lives, what's possible when people are empowered, no matter what they look like or where they come from.

And that's a vision that President Santos believes in. That's a vision that we share: that this is not just an abstract exercise at the highest levels of government. This is something that has to affect ordinary people in increasing their

security and their opportunity. That's what we mean when we talk about building a truly peaceful, prosperous Colombia. That's what we hope to help you realize: a place, as the great novelist Gabriel Garcia Marquez once imagined, a place "where no one will be able to decide for others how they die, where love will prove true and happiness be possible."

In this great work, Colombia will have no greater friend than the United States of America. *Muchas gracias.*

[At this point, President Santos made brief remarks in English as follows.]

*President Santos.* Thank you very much, Mr. President. And good evening to all of you. You said at the beginning that Americans love and admire Colombians. I must say the same thing: Colombians love and admire Americans. And they love you very much. You are the most popular person in the Colombian polls. [Laughter]

*President Obama.* That's good to know. That's not true here in the United States.

[President Santos continued in Spanish, and his remarks were translated by an interpreter as follows.]

*President Santos.* Today is a day to give thanks. Today I come back to Washington to thank you: to thank the people and the Government of the United States for the support that they have given to Colombia during the last 15 years and to project our cooperation in—throughout the next few years.

There are many people that I would like to recognize for their support who have participated in the creation and the administration of Plan Colombia over the past 30 years. Many of them are present here today. The ex-Presidents of the United States, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, as well as my predecessors, Andres Pastrana and Alvaro Uribe; the Secretaries, Ministers, Ambassadors, and high officials of both governments; the Senators, the Congressmen of the United States and of Colombia; the leaders and members of the armed forces and the police of both countries; of busi-

nessmen and so many people who have contributed to this plan: Thank you all very much.

And thank you to you, President Obama, because you've not only maintained your support for Plan Colombia, but you have inspired us to find a better and deeper partnership between our two countries.

Today we can say without a doubt that the goals that we had in 2000—such as fighting the drug war, strengthening institutions, and imposing the rule of law, and to take social programs to great parts of remote Colombian territory—have been—those objectives have been met.

Today's Colombia is much, much different from the Colombia of 15 years ago. Our country at that time was going through the worst recession—economic recession of the last 70 or 80 years. We were very far from controlling our own territory, and we were very close to being declared a failed state. Practically a third of our national territory was controlled by paramilitaries. Another third was being controlled by the guerrillas, and both were financed by drug trafficking. We had a very dark and uncertain future.

Today, the outlook is completely opposite. Today, we see the future with hope. We've gone from the worst economic recession in our recent history to being leaders in economic growth in America—in Latin America. And not just in growth: We are also leaders in job creation, in reducing poverty, in strengthening our middle class. We have gone from these shameful national—international championship of being the first in murders and kidnappings to have the lowest indexes of these crimes that we've ever had in the last 4 years. And despite the increase over the last 2 years in coca cultivation in Colombia, almost 60 percent of that cultivation has gone down. The number of rural families that are involved in this business of cultivating coca has been reduced by two-thirds.

And all of that, while we continue very vigorously and decidedly to fight against drug trafficking, so much so that last year, we were able to overcome all kinds of records in the volume of cocaine seized: more than 250 tons of it.

Those thousands of families who entered into the legal economy, thanks to your help, thanks to Plan Colombia, has—have shown us the way of what our cooperation can be over the next 15 years. In fact, we have already implemented a comprehensive policy of crop substitution that contemplates every link in the chain of drug trafficking. And it will be much more effective because it will attack the roots and not just the symptoms of this problem.

All of these advances are due in great part to the fact that 15 years ago, when we were in such serious straits, the Colombians received a friendly hand. And that friendly hand came from here, from Washington, from both sides of the aisle, Democrats and Republicans. And thus it has remained.

A lot of people say that Plan Colombia is the bipartisan incentive that has been most successful over the last few years. But people perceive it as an exclusively military or security initiative. But it was much more than that. It's true that Plan Colombia helped us to have the most powerful Armed Forces, the most effective Armed Forces that Colombia has ever had in its history, and they, today, are out there training armed forces of other countries in the region. But the reason for its success was that it was a comprehensive strategy: a strategy that also bet on social programs, on justice, on rural development, and on strengthening our democratic institutions.

In the name of the residents of that forgotten Colombia who are finally seeing the presence of a state, thank you. In the name of those rural dwellers who are now cultivating legal crops and have bettered their conditions of life, thank you. In the names of millions of Colombians who are starting to live without fear, thank you. But above all, in the name of new generations throughout Colombian territory, in the names of those children who can see a better future now, thank you. Thank you very much.

*[President Santos spoke in English as follows.]*

If in Colombia, we are on the brink of a peace agreement, I can say without a doubt that Colombia was crucial—that Plan Colombia

was crucial in helping us get there. From the very beginning, you, Mr. President, supported the risky and bold step of trying to achieve peace in our country. You were one of the first persons I confided my intentions to start a peace process back when many—the great majority—thought that it was basically a mission impossible. Many people warned me that it would be political suicide. Making war is so much easier than making peace. And you not only believed it was possible, you encouraged me to go ahead and gave me your full and enthusiastic support. Since then, you have walked by our side. And today, Mr. President, you stand with the Colombian people when we are on the verge of transforming this dream into reality.

I believe also that I speak for all the people in Latin America and the Caribbean, all the people who live south of the Rio Grande, when I say to you, thank you. Thank you, Mr. President, for your audacity in reestablishing diplomatic relations with Cuba. Thank you for understanding that peace in Colombia means peace for the entire region.

Peace will be the cherry on the cake of Plan Colombia and the start of a new chapter: a new

chapter of collaboration and friendship between our two nations; a chapter that we have decided—and what a good name—to call *Paz Colombia*. Peace Colombia.

Peace will help us consolidate a new nation, a country that will be safer, more prosperous, more just and equitable, better educated, and of course, happier. We'll be a country—a confident nation that will continue to earn the trust and admiration of the entire world. And we will build this new country in cooperation, shoulder to shoulder, with a dear and true friend: the United States of America.

Thank you.

*President Obama*. Thank you. Thank you so much. I'm really proud of you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:23 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Martin and Esteban Santos, sons of President Santos; U.S. Special Envoy for the Colombian Peace Process Bernard W. Aronson; musicians Shakira Isabel Mebarak Ripoll, Carlos Vives, and Jeison “Jeihco” Castañón; actors Sofia Vergara and John Leguizamo; and racecar driver Juan Pablo Montoya.

## Remarks on the National Economy and an Exchange With Reporters February 5, 2016

*The President*. TGIF, everybody. I wanted to stop by, because as you're aware by now, America's businesses created another 158,000 jobs last month. After reaching 10 percent in 2009, the unemployment rate has now fallen to 4.9 percent, even as more Americans joined the job market last month. So this is the first time that the unemployment rate has dipped below 5 percent in almost 8 years. Americans are working.

All told, over the past 6 years, our businesses have added 14 million new jobs. Seventy-one straight months of private sector job growth extends the longest streak on record. Over the past 2 years, 2014 and 2015, our businesses added more jobs than any time since the 1990s.

Most importantly, this progress is finally starting to translate into bigger paychecks. Over the past 6 months, wages have grown at their fastest rate since the crisis. And the policies that I'll push this year are designed to give workers even more leverage to earn raises and promotions.

So unemployment, deficits, gas prices are all down. Jobs, wages, and the rate of the insured are up. I should mention, by the way, that since I signed Obamacare into law, nearly 18 million Americans have gained coverage, and our businesses have created jobs every month since, on net, all of them full-time jobs.

So, as I said at my State of the Union Address, the United States of America right now has the strongest, most durable economy in the world. I know that's still inconvenient for Re-