

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-

publican stump speeches as their doom-and-despair tour plays in New Hampshire. I guess you cannot please everybody.

That does not mean that we don't have more work to do. There is softness in the global economy. China is going through a transition. Europe's economy is still slow. A lot of the emerging markets are challenged. So that's all creating headwinds for a lot of U.S. companies who do business overseas. It makes it more difficult for us to sell exports. So we've got to pay attention to this, and we've got to take some smart steps this year to continue progress. And we also have to do more to make sure that the progress that we do make is broadly based and impacting folks up and down the income scales. The budget that I send to Congress on Tuesday is going to make sure that we can continue that progress. Talking down the American economy, by the way, does not make that progress.

My budget is going to offer more opportunities for Americans to get the education and job training that they need for a good-paying job. It will offer new ideas for benefits and protections that provide folks with a basic sense of security. We'll create more good-paying jobs not by subsidizing the past, but by investing in the future. And that's why we're going to be placing a big emphasis on clean energy. Private sector solar jobs, for example, are growing 12 times faster than the rest of the economy, and they pay better than average. That's one reason why my budget is going to double our investment in clean energy research and development by the end of the decade. That's going to help businesses create more jobs faster, it's going to lower the cost of clean energy faster, it's going to help renewable power compete with dirty fuels across America in a more effective way.

Those are some of the steps that are going to make sure our future is even stronger, a future that is worthy of the hard work and determination of the American people. The progress we've made in going from 10 percent down to under 5, that's a testament to American workers, American businesses, the American people being resilient and sticking to it. And my hope

is, is that rather than hinder their progress, we're going to continue to help them make progress.

With that, have a great weekend. Enjoy the Super Bowl. I'm not telling you my pick—[laughter]—because the Bears aren't in it, and—but I'm hoping for a great game.

With that, Josh—is he back there?

Q. Yes.

*The President.* Josh, take it away.

### *Public Perceptions of the Economy*

Q. How about a question?

Q. Yes, yes. You seemed to imply yesterday that you don't get enough credit. Were you—

*The President.* You know what, let—I'm going to—let me take a couple of questions here.

*White House Press Secretary Joshua R. Earnest.* All right, thank you.

*The President.* Why not? Just, what the heck.

Q. It's Friday.

*The President.* I'm in a good mood. It's Friday.

Q. It's Friday. Throw us a—

*The President.* Go ahead.

Q. Okay. So you were implying yesterday, in a joking way, that you don't get enough credit—

*The President.* Oh, this is when I was talking to—with the Warriors—

Q. With the Warriors.

*The President.* Right, right.

Q. Okay, so were you again referring, as you did just now, to Republicans and their message, which you could say could be expected during an election? Or were you also referring to the fact that polls—like, 70—57 percent of Americans in polls say they don't think things are going well in this country. What—why do you think that is?

*The President.* Well, at the time, I was making a joke with a basketball team. But there's no doubt that while we have made significant progress—and I talked about this during the State of the Union—there is still anxiety and concern about the general direction of the economy. If you look at some of the surveys, people feel better about their circumstances, their finances, but they're not sure about the

future. And part of it is, there's still a pretty big carryover from the devastation that took place in 2007, 2008. If your home value drops in half or you lose a job that you thought you were secure in or your pension suddenly looks vulnerable, you're going to remember that. And so a lot of people still feel that.

And they're right to recognize that there are some longer term economic trends that we still have to tackle: that the economy is more dynamic and it churns faster and the pressure on companies to maximize short-term returns, oftentimes at the expense of long-term investment; the lack of loyalty sometimes to workers who have built those companies and are threatened to lay off—be laid off; the fact that wages and incomes up until the last 6 months haven't gone up as fast as corporate profits have or benefits at the very top. All those things people feel and they experience.

And so even though they know things are better, they're worried where are we going. And I think—so I think that the argument I'm making here and will continue to make during the course of this year is, we should be proud of the progress we've made. We have recovered from the worst economic crisis since the 1930s, the worst in my lifetime and the lifetime of most of the people in this room. And we've done it faster, stronger, better, more durably than just about any other advanced economy.

Had we adopted some of the policies that were advocated by Republicans over the last 4, 5, 6 years, we know that we probably would have done worse. And we know that because a lot of European countries adopted those policies, and they haven't yet gotten to the same place they were before the crisis. So evidence, facts are on our side. And this jobs report gives you one more indication that the facts are on our side.

I think that it is important for us then to understand how do we take the next step and make people feel more secure and feel more confident about the future. And that's why investments in education and job training; going after the high costs of higher education; making sure that issues like paid leave and family leave are put in place; raising the minimum

wage so that if you're working full time, you're not in poverty; making sure that we're investing in transportation, infrastructure, and clean energy; going after the jobs of the future; investing in technology—all those things are a recipe for continued growth and increased security.

And as far as I can tell, those who are running down the economy and adding to the anxiety don't seem to have any plausible, coherent recipe other than cut taxes for the very folks who have been doing the best in this economy and somehow, magically, that's going to make other folks feel good.

Or alternatively, they argue that the reason you're feeling insecure is because immigrants or poor people are taking more and more of your paycheck. And that is just not true. The facts don't bear that out. That's not where the weaknesses in the economy are. That's not what's depressing wages for middle class families or making them more vulnerable to disruptions in this economy. And I want to keep on making that argument during the course of this year.

We should feel good about the progress we've made, understanding that we've still got more work to do. It's sort of like, I'm 54 now, so I got to work out harder to stay in shape. [Laughter] And if I'm feeling good in the gym, I want to acknowledge that what I'm doing is working. Otherwise, I'll just go off and have a big, double-bacon cheeseburger or something because I'll think, well, this isn't working.

No, if it's working, then we should be staying on that same path. That doesn't mean that I'm where I necessarily want to be. It doesn't mean that I stop doing some hard work to get where we need to go.

All right? I was only going to make two—I'm just going to take two. So, all right, go ahead.

#### *Labor Force Participation Rate/Oil Prices/Oil Tax Policy*

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. How can you improve workforce participation levels? Because as much as people talk about the recovery, so few Americans are now, relatively speaking, in the job force, especially compared

to 2008. And if you wouldn't mind, sir, can you at least comment on the \$10-per-barrel fee that we've heard so much about?

*The President.* On the first question, part of what was good in this jobs report is the fact that the participation rate, in fact, didn't drop. That wasn't the reason why unemployment dropped. More people are entering into the workforce. They feel more confident, and they're finding work.

But what is true is, is that we're still at a point where the labor participation rate is lower than it has been historically.

*Q.* Why?

*The President.* Some of that is explained by demographics. The population is getting older, and so you would expect that there is some decline. But it's not fully explained by Americans getting older. Some of this is still the hangover from what happened in 2007 and 2008. And this is part of the reason why we have to keep our foot to the accelerator in terms of doing the things that need to be done to keep the economy growing and keep it strong.

We should not let up from the progress that's been made so that the labor market continues to tighten, people feel more confident that if they go out and look for work that they can find it. There are particular cases where some folks have just been out of the labor market for a long time and may not be equipped for the jobs of today. And that's where we've got to target some special efforts.

I get a lot of letters from middle-age workers who got laid off, aren't confident about their current skills, and so have not yet reentered the workforce. They need to get retrained. And so that's a special group: folks in their late forties, early fifties, still far away from retirement, but feel like they can't adapt.

Obviously, there are young people, high school dropouts, folks in both rural communities and inner cities that just have—came of age right in the middle of this terrible recession

and haven't gotten attached to the labor market yet. And so we've got to make special efforts to figure out how do we get them into job training programs or community college, and it allows them to get some skills.

So there's a wide set of strategies we can take on that, but it's all—it's going to require overall, though, a strong labor market for them to feel like it's worth it to make these efforts. And we want to keep making sure that the labor market is as strong as possible.

With respect to oil and energy, I'll probably make a larger speech about that and the direction that we need to go on this. The basic proposition is, is that right now gas is \$1.80. And gas prices are expected to be low for a while, for the foreseeable future. That, overall, can be a good thing for the economy. But what is also important is that we use this period where gas prices are low to accelerate a transition to a cleaner energy economy because we know that's not going to last. Every one of us have seen cycles where gas prices go down and then they pop back up.

And the idea here is, is that we—if we say to oil companies—which, by the way, got a significant benefit when we, in the omnibus, allowed them for the first time to export oil; up until that point, domestic oil producers couldn't export. So if we say to them now, all right, oil companies, we know that you're having to retool, we know that prices are low right now, you're allowed to export, but what we're also saying is, is that we're going to provide—we're going to impose a tax on a barrel of oil—imported, exported—so that some of that revenue can be used for transportation, some of that revenue can be used for the investments in basic research and technology that's going to be needed for the energy sources of the future. Then, 10 years from now, 15 years from now, 20 years from now, we're going to be in a much stronger position when oil starts getting tight again, prices start going up again.

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\* White House correction: Exported crude oil and refined fuels would not be subject to the per-barrel fee. The fee is designed to be paid by oil companies and would cover imported and domestically produced crude oil and refined fuels that are burned in the United States. This would maintain a level playing field for U.S. producers.

We will have further weaned our economy off of dirty fuels. We will have not just made environmental progress, but we'll also have a much stronger economy, a stronger infrastructure. We'll be creating the jobs of the future. And I think we'll look back and we'll say, that was a smart investment, that was a wise decision for us to make.

That—but the point is, it's right to do it now when gas prices are really low. And they will be low for quite some time to come, so it's not going to be a disruptive factor in terms of the economy. All right?

[At this point, many reporters began speaking at once.]

Okay, guys. Of course, they always say something. I only said two questions, but I hope you guys have a wonderful Super Bowl party. All right? Thank you, guys.

Q. Are you still in a good mood?

The President. I am in a good mood. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:31 p.m. in the James S. Brady Press Briefing Room at the White House.

## Statement on the International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting February 5, 2016

Thirteen years ago tomorrow, four First Ladies in Africa came together and declared an International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). They knew that by targeting and holding back girls, this practice harms and holds back entire communities. Since then, countless others—from the Middle East to South Asia to here in the United States—have joined these women to say that FGM/C has no place in any community and undermines our efforts to celebrate and empower women and girls.

Some people say that FGM/C is a rite of passage, something families do to help prepare girls for adulthood or marriage. In my travels last year, I made clear my view that “there’s no reason that young girls should suffer genital mutilation.” Just because this is a tradition in some places does not make it right. This practice is harmful, and therefore wrong, wherever it occurs. That is why we have funded programming to combat FGM/C in places like Guinea, just as we have launched a range of actions here at home to stop the practice. In the

United States, we have criminalized the transport of girls to undergo FGM/C, worked with religious leaders and community-based organizations to raise awareness—especially in some immigrant communities, where the pressures to engage in this practice remain—and provided grant opportunities for domestic NGOs implementing innovative prevention strategies.

Today we stand with communities here and around the globe working to prevent FGM/C. We call on girls and their families, teachers, health workers, community and religious leaders, and government officials to act together to make a difference. It’s time to put an end to this harmful practice and to allow communities everywhere to meet their full potential by enabling women and girls to meet theirs.

NOTE: The statement referred to the late former First Lady Stella Obasanjo of Nigeria; former First Lady Chantal Compaore of Burkina Faso; former First Lady Henriette Conte of Guinea; and former First Lady Touré Lobbo Troaré of Mali.

## The President’s Weekly Address February 6, 2016

Hi, everybody. One of the things that makes America great is our passion for innovation:

that spirit of discovery and entrepreneurship that helps us meet any challenge.