

process for nominating and confirming judges that is beyond repair. It would make it increasingly impossible for any President, Republican or Democrat, to carry out their constitutional function. To go down that path would jeopardize our system of justice, it would hurt our democracy, and it would betray the vision of our founding.

I've fulfilled my constitutional duty. Now it's time for Senators to do theirs. I hope that they take the time to reflect on the importance of this process to our country. I hope that they'll act fairly. And I hope they'll work in a bipartisan fashion to confirm Merrick Garland to the Supreme Court. That's how we can uphold our pledge to liberty and justice for all, for our time and for generations to come.

## Remarks to United States Embassy Personnel and Families in Havana, Cuba March 20, 2016

*The President.* Thank you. *Muchas gracias.* Hello! Well, it's so good to see everybody. Thank you. Hello, everybody.

*Audience members.* Hi!

*The President.* Well, as our Ambassador—or Chief of Mission just stated, the—it's been nearly 90 years since a U.S. President stepped foot in Cuba. It is wonderful to be here.

Back in 1928, President Coolidge came on a battleship. It took him 3 days to get here. It only took me 3 hours. [*Laughter*] For the first time ever, Air Force One has landed in Cuba, and this is our very first stop. So this is a historic visit, and it's a historic opportunity to engage directly with the Cuban people and to forge new agreements and commercial deals, to build new ties between our two peoples, and for me to lay out my vision for a future that's brighter than our past.

Michelle and I wanted to start with all of you because nothing symbolizes better the new relationship between the United States and the Cuban people. For the first time in more than half a century, as Jeff just noted, the American flag flies over a reopened U.S. Embassy. And having a U.S. Embassy here means that we're able to more effectively advance our interests

Thanks, everybody. And have a good weekend.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 4:05 p.m. on March 18 in the Blue Room at the White House for broadcast on March 19. In the address, the President referred to Shirley Garland, mother of Supreme Court Associate Justice-designate Merrick B. Garland; and Associate Justices Sonia M. Sotomayor and Elena Kagan. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on March 18, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on March 19. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

and our values and understand the Cuban people and their concerns.

I want to thank the outstanding leadership team that's here, especially our outstanding Ambassador, Jeff DeLaurentis, and his wonderful wife Jennifer. Give them a big round of applause. As well as DCM Scott Hamilton and his wife Isabel. Give them a big round of applause. Yay!

But most of all, I want to thank all of you, who embody the spirit of friendship and partnership that brings us together today. We've got a lot of proud Americans here, but we also have a lot of proud Cubans. So, *como andan?* [*Laughter*]

I want to mention three of our Cuban friends who have been a part of your work for decades, including all those years when we only had an Interest Section here: a guard for 30 years, Carlos Flores; in our visa section, Caridad Castellanos; and a dedicated driver for almost 40 years, Francisco Camargo. Yay!

So I know it's been a pretty busy 7 months. You've had to stand up America's newest Embassy, you've helped support high-profile visitors from across the administration and the business community and now me and Michelle. And I know your workload is a lot heavier than it was, but I want you to know

everything we've accomplished so far—more Americans coming to Cuba; more engagement with the Cuban people, civil society, faith groups, entrepreneurs, students, young people; more opportunities for the Cuban people to improve their lives—it's all happening because of you. Every single day, you're bringing the Cuban people and the American people closer together.

So, oftentimes, when I come to Embassies, it attracts a lot of attention, and this one attracts more attention than usual. [Laughter] But I always say to people that no matter how much people are excited about Michelle's visit or my visit, the most important ambassadors to the United—for the United States are all of you, because you're the ones who, every day, are interacting with Cubans here. You're helping businesses who are trying to figure out ways that they can start working together. You're helping people with visas. You're helping people with a whole range of things. And so the interactions you have end up having the most lasting impact, because it sends a signal of

the professionalism and dedication and the kindness and courtesy that I want the American people always to represent.

And so I am so grateful to all of you for the great work that you've done. I'm glad that you had a chance to bring your families here—[laughter]—because I always like taking pictures with kids. [Laughter] That's the future that we hope for; young American children, young Cuban children, by the time they're adults, our hope is, is that they think it's natural that a U.S. President should be visiting Cuba, they think it's natural that the two peoples are working together. Their future is what we work for so hard, and I'm so grateful to all of you for making it happen.

Thank you very much. *Muchas gracias.*

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:23 p.m. in the Telde Ballroom of the Meliá Habana hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Chargé d'Affaires Jeffrey DeLaurentis, who introduced the President; and Deputy Chief of Mission Scott Hamilton.

## The President's News Conference With President Raúl Castro Ruz of Cuba in Havana

March 21, 2016

*President Castro.* Mr. President Barack Obama, we are pleased to welcome you on this, the first visit of a President of the United States of America to our country in 88 years. We have observed that in the 15 months that have passed since the decision was made to establish our diplomatic relations, we have obtained concrete results. We were able to resume direct postal exchanges, and we signed an agreement to resume commercial flights.

We have signed two memorandums of understanding on the protection of the environment and maritime areas and another one to secure the safety of sea navigation. Today another one will be signed on cooperation in the area of agriculture. At the moment, another set of bilateral instruments are being negotiated to cooperate in such areas as counternarcotics, the safety of commerce and travelers, and

health. About this last issue, we have agreed to deepen our cooperation in the prevention and treatment of transmissible diseases such as Zika and nontransmissible chronic diseases, cancer included.

This cooperation is beneficial not only for Cuba and the United States, but also for our hemisphere at large. Following the decisions made by President Obama to modify the application of some aspects of the blockade, Cuban enterprises and their American counterparts are working to identify possible commercial operations that could materialize in the still restrictive framework of existing regulations.

The fact is that some have already materialized, especially in the area of telecommunications, an area in which our country already has a program designed on the basis of its priorities and the necessary technological sovereignty,