

*Administration of Barack Obama, 2011*

**Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia**

*March 7, 2011*

*President Obama.* Hello, everybody! Hey, guys. How are you? Good to see you. Nice to see you.

Well, the—it is wonderful to be back at Wakefield. Some of you remember I was here a couple of years ago, right? It was a year and a half ago? I know I had less gray hair the last time I was here. [*Laughter*]

We wanted to stop by because we have a very special guest here today. But before I do that, I just want to say—I'm assuming you guys are all aware that this is Ms. Fraley's birthday.

*Students.* Yes.

Q. Can we sing "Happy Birthday"?

*President Obama.* Should we sing "Happy Birthday"?

*Students.* Yes!

*President Obama.* So let's—I'll kick us off.

[*At this point, the President led the class in singing "Happy Birthday."*]

*President Obama.* For those of you in the back, you should know that Ms. Fraley was selected as one of the Virginia Teachers of the Year. So we're very proud of that. I was just talking to her. It turns out that she's been teaching now for 10 years. Before she was teaching, she was a journalist. So she decided to make a change and get into something useful. [*Laughter*] I couldn't resist—[*laughter*—I couldn't resist.

Now, for our real order of business here, we have a wonderful special guest. This is Prime Minister Julia Gillard. She has come all the way from Australia. She will be addressing a joint session of Congress, which is a very unique honor. Few heads of state get the privilege of addressing a joint session of Congress. But the reason that she's been asked to do this is because we have as close of an alliance with Australia as any country in the world. We have a shared democracy. We have shared values. Their football is a little different than ours. [*Laughter*]

But there are very few countries where we've got such a close bond and such a unique bond. And that dates back for decades. But it's also manifest today, where, for example, Australia is one of the leading coalition partners in Afghanistan, so our soldiers are fighting side by side. We cooperate on a whole range of security issues and economic issues. The reason we wanted to stop by a school was in part because Prime Minister Gillard used to be the Minister of Education in Australia. So she takes a great interest in how our young people are developing and how we're preparing them for the 21st-century economy.

So we are thrilled to have her here. Madam Prime Minister.

*Prime Minister Julia E. Gillard of Australia.* Thank you very much. I was saying to the President as we came here that I've been to a Washington school before, when I was in Washington and was taken to a school. It was actually a primary school, much younger

children. And I was a few minutes into my address when one small boy turned to the small boy next to him and said, "Is she speaking English?" [Laughter] So provided all of you understand me today, I'm going to count this as a success.

But I thought I would come along today and just talk to you about Australia and actually start by asking you a few questions, a bit of a pop quiz about Australia. You're looking confident—[laughter]—

*President Obama.* You guys better be prepared.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Okay, okay.

*President Obama.* Don't embarrass Ms. Fraley. [Laughter]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* We've got some Australian journalists here, so if you can't answer the questions, then I'm sure they'll be able to, so—[laughter].

Anybody got any idea the population of Australia, how many people? [Laughter] Just a guess?

*President Obama.* Anybody want to take a stab?

Q. Twenty-one million?

*President Obama.* Very close.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Very close. Twenty-two million.

*President Obama.* Do you have, like, an iPad over there? [Laughter] That was pretty impressive. Good job. All right.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Okay, what about size? How big is it? As big as America?

Q. As big as the United States.

Q. A little bit bigger.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* A little bit bigger?

Q. Oh, really?

*Prime Minister Gillard.* No. [Laughter] You're giving us a little bit of extra terrain.

Q. A little bit smaller.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* It's a little bit—there you go. There are only two choices: a little bit bigger or a little bit smaller. [Laughter]

Q. Maybe exactly the same.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* No, it's about 20 percent less in size than America. But 20 million people, 20 percent less in size. So that's worth knowing. Who knows anything about Australian-rules football?

Q. Ask him.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* You do?

Q. I've watched a little bit.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* You've watched a little bit? And what do you think? Pretty tough game?

Q. It's hard to understand. [Laughter]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Okay. I've been trying to describe it to the President. It can be a bit hard to understand.

*President Obama.* She brought me an Australian football. She was kicking it in my office. [Laughter] Almost broke a bust of Lincoln. It was really—[laughter]. That's not true, guys. I'm just making that up.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Handballing it in the office.

*President Obama.* I don't want to cause a diplomatic incident. [Laughter]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* We didn't break anything; we were handballing. So has anybody got a question about Australia? Yes.

### *Australian Vegemite Food Paste*

Q. My family and I have been wondering this for a little while: What is Vegemite?

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Right. [Laughter] This is also a little bit of a division between the President and I. I love Vegemite, and—

*President Obama.* It's horrible. [Laughter]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* It's actually a byproduct of making beer, apparently. That's how the story goes. It's a yeast paste. I'm making this sound really good, aren't I? [Laughter] It's black, and it's quite salty. The beginner's error with Vegemite is to put too much on a piece of bread or piece of toast. You don't put it on like jam or anything like that. You've got to do it very lightly, spread it very thinly. And it's good.

*President Obama.* So it's like a quasi-vegetable-byproduct paste—[laughter]—that you smear on your toast for breakfast. Sounds good, doesn't it? [Laughter]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* But we'll get some sent over, and you can have a try. It's addictive. Once you've had some when you were small, you'll crave it when you're an adult.

*President Obama.* All right. Fair enough.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* You've got to start eating it when you're young, though. Other Australian questions? Yes.

### *Difference Between Australian and U.S. Schools*

Q. What's the biggest difference between Australian schools and U.S. schools?

*Prime Minister Gillard.* The biggest difference? I think a lot of things are the same. We've got about 9,500 schools in the country, so a lot less than here, which is what you would imagine. I think the things that we study and the way that we benchmark standards are around about the same. And one of the things we're both trying to do, so President Obama is very focused on and I'm very focused on, is making sure the schools that haven't been meeting the right national testing results are getting boosted up, because we don't want disadvantaged students falling behind.

So I think if you went to one of our schools, you'd see a classroom pretty much like this one.

### *Flooding in Australia*

Q. How has the flooding affected education and how kids get to school?

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Yes, it did stop kids going to school for a while. So we had the flooding right through Queensland, and then we had the cyclone, which hit in north and far north Queensland after that. Some of the schools they brought back a few weeks late because kids couldn't get to school. The schools were flood damaged. But people are getting back into it and back into normal life now.

A lot of the schools acted as relief centers, so during the worst of the flooding, that is where people could go to pick up food supplies or to see someone who might be able to help them with emergency cash or put them in contact with a counselor if they were finding the strain of it too much. So schools were a real backbone. But kids missed a few weeks of school.

Some of the kids I talked to thought that wasn't such a bad deal—[laughter]—missing a couple of weeks of school. But everybody is getting back into it now.

*President Obama.* Now, the flooding area was about the size of Texas. Is that right? The amount of land that was covered by the floods?

*Prime Minister Gillard.* It was huge. We were—the comparison we were doing was a bit like France and Germany, that kind of size, so a huge area. And I had the opportunity to go up in the air and see it a few times, and just filthy floodwater, because floodwater is filthy, as far as the eye could see. And it was a sort of rolling crisis, so we had flooding in places like Rockhampton, and then it came down to some small places like Dalby and Condamine. So that was the first phase of it. And then we had those very dangerous flash floods in Toowoomba and into the Lockyer Valley that cost people a lot of—a lot of lives were lost because there was no warning. And then Brisbane, which is one of our big cities, was flooded. So we had a whole capital city closed down for a few days because of the flooding.

And then when we'd gotten through all of that, then we had a category 5 cyclone hit in the north and far north, and that caused a lot of devastation in places like Tully and Cardwell, which had been evacuated because the force of the cyclone was going to be so strong.

So it's been a tough time, but Queenslanders particularly are resilient sorts. They breed them pretty tough in Queensland, so they're getting on with it and rebuilding.

*President Obama.* Anybody else?

*President's Travel to Australia*

Q. Mr. President, when are you coming to Australia? [Laughter]

*President Obama.* You know, the—well, now—

*Prime Minister Gillard.* She's joined the class. [Laughter]

*President Obama.* Right. I actually went to Australia. Some of you know that when I was a kid, I lived in Indonesia briefly for about 4 years. And Indonesia is sort of in the same vicinity as Australia. So when you fly—back then, at least—now there are probably more direct flights, but back then, oftentimes you had to fly through Australia. So I ended up having a chance to get to know Aussies when I was 8 years old—[laughter]—and—wonderful people. And very similar to Americans in the sense that—very open, very friendly—partly because—we were talking about this earlier—they have a similar sort of frontier spirit. There's a lot of open space there, a lot of people who obviously migrated there and—some by choice, some—

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Some not so much.

*President Obama.* Some not so much. [*Laughter*]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Early convicts. Not so much by choice. [*Laughter*]

*President Obama.* But—so you have a similar openness, a great—a premium on individualism and freedom. So there's a lot that binds our two countries together.

Any other questions? You guys can ask questions for me if you want. [*Laughter*]

### *Australian Sports*

Q. Do you play basketball in Australia?

*Prime Minister Gillard.* Yes, we do play basketball in Australia. In fact, Secretary Duncan is over here, your Secretary of Education—

*President Obama.* Arne Duncan, yes.

*Prime Minister Gillard.* —and he played basketball in Australia.

*President Obama.* Played professional basketball in Australia.

*Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.* I was the leading scorer for 4 years.

*President Obama.* Were you the leading scorer in the league?

*Secretary Duncan.* No. [*Laughter*]

*President Obama.* Come on, Reggie. I might have believed him. He's still got game, by the way. [*Laughter*]

*Prime Minister Gillard.* I went to a basketball game in Townsville earlier this year. They're the Townsville Crocs, so they come with a mascot, which is a man in a crocodile suit. And anything can happen when that mascot's there. [*Laughter*]

*President Obama.* Anybody else? Don't be intimidated by these guys.

Q. How many of these Presidents can you name around the room? [*Laughter*]

*President Obama.* That's Lincoln. [*Laughter*] And that's Washington.

Q. You're over there, in the back.

*President Obama.* How's that?

Q. You're over there.

*President Obama.* Nice, nice. So what have you guys been talking about in AP history class?

Q. The twenties.

*President Obama.* The twenties?

Q. Yes.

Q. The Roaring Twenties.

*President Obama.* What's been the focus of the twenties, the Roaring Twenties?

Q. Jazz.

*President Obama.* Jazz.

Q. Prohibition.

*President Obama.* Prohibition. Has there been a debate in class about prohibition?

Q. Not quite.

*President Obama.* All right. What prompted all of you to take AP history?

Q. Ms. Fraley, of course.

Q. She's a wonderful teacher.

Q. I love her.

*President Obama.* Look at all these folks sucking up to her. Good grief. [*Laughter*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:52 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Colette Fraley, teacher, Wakefield High School; and Personal Aide to the President Reginald L. Love. A portion of these remarks could not be verified because the audio was incomplete.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Wakefield High School, remarks and a question-and-answer session in Arlington, VA.

*Locations:* Arlington, VA.

*Names:* Duncan, Arne; Fraley, Colette; Gillard, Julia E.; Love, Reginald L.

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