

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Honoring the 2010 NCAA Football Champion Auburn University Tigers

June 8, 2011

The President. Hello, everybody. Please have a seat, have a seat. Welcome to the White House. And congratulations to the Auburn Tigers. War Eagle! I notice you all brought some Alabama weather up here too.

I want to start by recognizing some very proud Members of Congress who are here today. Members of Congress delegation, where are you? Here you go, all the Alabama crew right here—Shelby, Sessions too. They are very proud. All they do is just talk about you all, Alabama and Auburn. I don't know which way they—

Audience member. Auburn—

The President. Okay. See? [*Laughter*]

Head Coach Gene Chizik. Auburn first.

The President. And I want to welcome back to the White House—this is a point of personal privilege—the biggest Auburn fan I've ever met: my former Press Secretary, Robert Gibbs, is in the house, along with my main man Ethan Gibbs—[*laughter*]—who has inherited the passion for Auburn that his dad had. Look at Gibbs, has his tie and everything. Come on. [*Laughter*]

As some of you may know, Gibbs was born in Auburn. His parents worked in the university library, so he and his brother grew up watching the Tigers play. So earlier this year when the team was making its run to the championship, Robert was insufferable. He had a little statue of Aubie on his desk. [*Laughter*] He had his son, Ethan—he and Ethan would roll the trees in front of the yard after a big win. [*Laughter*] So this is a big day for him.

Now, this visit was originally scheduled to happen a couple of months ago. But 2 days before this team was supposed to be in Washington, the State of Alabama was hit by a series of devastating tornadoes.

So Michelle and I went down with many members of the congressional delegation to meet some of the folks who had lost loved ones, make sure everything possible was being done to help the community get back on its feet. And it was a heartbreaking visit. Coach and I were just talking about—you don't understand the devastation until you see it firsthand.

But what was also inspiring was the amount of strength and generosity that was shown by so many people in the midst of so much tragedy. And that includes the members of this program. Two days after the tornado, almost 70 Auburn coaches, players, and athletic department staff, led by Coach, traveled to Pleasant Grove and Cullman to help out with relief efforts.

And even though one of the toughest hit areas by the storm was the home of the Crimson Tide, this team knew what we all know in situations like this, which is we're all on the same team. We're all Americans first and foremost, and we've got an obligation to support each other in times of need.

So I've said before, I will say again, we will continue to stand with the victims of these disasters—whether they're in Tuscaloosa or in Joplin, Missouri, which I just visited a couple weeks ago—we're going to do this as long as it takes until families are able to rebuild.

Now, the reason obviously we're celebrating today is because of a happier moment for the people of Alabama and to congratulate the Tigers for winning their first national title since before I was born. [Laughter] And I'm getting quite a bit of gray hair. [Laughter] So that was a long wait for Tigers fans.

It wasn't always an easy road. This team played one of the toughest schedules in all of college football last year. In nine games, they came from behind to win, including after being down 24-0 on the road to Alabama. Unbelievable—that was an unbelievable game. I watched that game. I'm busy, but I watched that game. [Laughter] That was unbelievable.

As senior linebacker Josh Byner so eloquently put it: "Guys just went out there and fought their behinds off." That's what he said: "behinds." [Laughter]

Now of course I've got to give credit to a couple players that haven't gotten a lot of attention but did a great job. There's a guy named Cam Newton—[laughter]—who had a pretty good season and went on to win the Heisman Trophy. So obviously, that's really extraordinary.

There's a guy named Fairley who won the Lombardi Trophy—the top defensive lineman in the Nation. You know, this guy is rough, Fairley. [Laughter] You don't want to be tackled by him; you really don't. No.

Nick Fairley. Cam.

The President. See, he said Cam, so they're thinking next year in the NFL—[laughter]—they're not going to be on the same team.

But as crucial as Cam and Nick were to this team's success, obviously this is a team sport and you only win it with a team that is passionate and dedicated. They had help from teammates like freshman Michael Dyer who ran—where's Michael? There he is down there—ran an incredible 37-yard run on that final drive after everybody except Michael thought he had been tackled. [Laughter] Actually I give—that was some good coaching—[laughter]—because the folks on the sidelines were all like, "Get up, get up!" [Laughter]

Teammates like senior Wes Byrum, who knew he had to knock the winning field goal through for the guys who had been fighting that whole game. Where's Wes? There you go. Good job, Wes.

And obviously, Coach Chizik who in just two seasons had helped the Tigers go from good to great.

And then there's the Auburn family: the folks who celebrated at Toomer's Corner no matter what, no matter what the weather was; folks who haven't missed a game in decades and have waited a generation for a feeling like this. So I'm sure that I speak on behalf of the team. Everybody here has a little piece of that title.

So I want to congratulate this team once again on a great season. I want to thank them for taking the time during this visit to meet with some local kids from DC and share a little joy and inspiration. One of the things that the First Lady is constantly reminding our young people about is athletics is not just a spectator sport. Even if you're not going to be a Nick Fairley or a

Cam Newton, you can still get out there and move. And so for the players here to send that message to young people I think is tremendous, and we really appreciate it.

So I hope everybody has a wonderful visit and once again I just want to say congratulations to an outstanding team and national champions. Thank you so much.

Coach Chizik. Thank you, Mr. President. And what an honor and a privilege, obviously it is for the whole Auburn family to be able to stand here in the White House today and really embrace this moment. And this is not just a great championship team; it's got great, great character, it's got great kids, and they care about communities. They care about service. They care about doing all the right things.

What I'd like to do today is I'd like to introduce one of our seniors, which, by the way, I really want to say a word of appreciation. So many of our seniors that have been—they're spread out. They're—they've moved on with their life, decided to come back today just for this event.

The President. That's great.

Coach Chizik. —and it's big for us. But Kodi Burns, one of the most selfless players we have on our football team, has a special presentation to you from Auburn University.

The President. All right, Kodi. What do we got here?

Kodi Bruns. Mr. President, on behalf of Auburn football, I want to present you with this helmet.

The President. That's a nice looking helmet there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Burns. As well as your exclusive Auburn football national championship jersey.

The President. Exclusive. There you go. [*Laughter*]

All right. Let's—we're going to strike the podium so we can get a good picture.

[*At this point, the podium was removed, and the President posed for a photograph with the helmet, the team jersey, and members of the Auburn University Tigers organization.*]

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:10 p.m. in East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Robert and Nancy Gibbs, parents of former White House Press Secretary Robert L. Gibbs.

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