

Administration of Barack Obama, 2011

Remarks Honoring the 2010 NASCAR Sprint Cup Series Champion
September 7, 2011

The President. Thank you, everybody. Please have a seat. Have a seat. Welcome to the White House, and congratulations to Jimmie Johnson on winning his fifth straight Sprint Cup Championship.

Before we start, I do want to acknowledge some people who are here today. First of all, an outstanding American, somebody who's been a great friend and adviser to me, General Ray Odierno, the incoming Army Chief of Staff, is here. So please give him a big round of applause. We've got a host of Members of Congress. I'm not going to name them all, but they're all big NASCAR fans. They're right here in the front row.

Brian France the CEO of NASCAR, and his wife Amy couldn't make it here because of the storm. But I want to thank them for everything that they do.

It's great to welcome NASCAR back to Washington. It's great to have Number 48 parked outside. *[Laughter]* I was just telling these guys I'm not allowed to drive much these days—*[laughter]*—basically just my golf cart at Camp David, which is called Golf Cart One. *[Laughter]* True. *[Laughter]* But I will say that it's pretty tough to look at Number 48 and not want to jump in and take a few laps, although I'm sure Jimmie would not be happy if I was doing that.

The last time many of these drivers were here, Jimmie was celebrating his third straight championship. He's got a couple more titles under his belt now. But another big change in the Johnson house: He and Chandra are now parents of Genevieve Marie, who was born late July. So congratulations on that.

I told Jimmie you cannot beat daughters. And I know Jimmie is pretty excited to be a daddy. He whipped out, like, the iPhone with the pictures on it the minute I asked about it. *[Laughter]* I hear that he is in charge of taking Genevieve Marie to music class. And because of his unique work schedule, Jimmie is usually the only dad there, so—*[laughter]*. But that's a good sign of being a good dad.

So Jimmie's got a lot to be proud of. And that's especially true when you think of what it means to win five championships in a row. NASCAR is a sport where anything that can go wrong will go wrong at some point during the season—similar to being President. *[Laughter]* That's true even for the best drivers. And with so much extraordinary talent that is going bumper-to-bumper in every race, just making the Chase is hard enough, let alone winning the whole thing.

And that's why Jimmie is not just one of the best drivers of all time, he's up there with some of the great sports dynasties. If you think about it, the—only the Boston Celtics, the Yankees, and the Canadiens have ever won more than four titles in a row. And now Jimmie's breathing down the necks of Dale Earnhardt and Richard Petty for the most NASCAR titles ever, which is not bad for the son of a machine operator and a school bus driver who still has plenty of seasons ahead of him.

Jimmie's talent has been to make a very difficult, demanding sport look easy. But this year, the Number 48 team also showed its toughness. They entered the last race of the Chase trailing and ended up pulling off an extraordinary comeback.

And if you ask Jimmie, he'll give credit to that team, led by owner Rick Hendrick and crew chief Chad Knaus, who couldn't be here today. We also need to give credit, though, to the other Chase drivers up here who want Jimmie to know that the second he makes a mistake, they will be ready to knock him out of the victory lane. *[Laughter]*

I did observe that lately there's been some trash-talking in NASCAR. *[Laughter]* I was—I thought I was watching WWF. *[Laughter]* But that's good. You got to have a little feistiness, and these guys are extraordinary competitors. And that's what makes this sport so exciting to watch, because everything can come down to just one race, one pit stop, one split-second decision.

Now, what also makes NASCAR special is the difference that it makes in the lives of so many people, especially our troops and their families. And I personally thanked all these guys for what they've been doing on behalf of military families, who are obviously huge fans of NASCAR.

Last month, the drivers and staff toured Walter Reed hospital, served dinner to 400 wounded warriors and their loved ones. NASCAR has been a huge supporter of the Joining Forces program that Michelle and Dr. Jill Biden have set up to support military families. This morning, Jimmie made a special visit to the Pentagon to spend time with folks over there. And later this week, NASCAR will be honoring our military and first-responders again in Richmond the night before the anniversary of 9/11.

So I want to congratulate Jimmie. I want to congratulate all the drivers who are on the stage for their extraordinary success, for the success of NASCAR, and for everything that they do for our country.

Good luck heading into this year's Chase, everybody. We will all be watching.

So thank you very much. And I think—Jimmie, do you want to—

Jimmie Johnson. Yes.

The President. —tell me what you got here?

Mr. Johnson. Absolutely. Well, first of all, thank you for having us here. We all greatly appreciate it. And on behalf of myself and our race team, the Lowe's Hendrick Motorsports team, we have some gloves here that were worn in Las Vegas when I won. I wanted to present them to go—

The President. That's pretty sharp.

Mr. Johnson. —with the helmet we gave to you last time we were here.

The President. I will wear the helmet and the gloves—*[laughter]*—when I'm—

Mr. Johnson. Halloween?

The President. —driving—no, "Golf Cart One." *[Laughter]*

Mr. Johnson. Fantastic.

The President. Absolutely.

Mr. Johnson. Be safe.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gary and Cathy Johnson, parents of Jimmie Johnson. He also referred to the WWF, the World Wrestling Federation, the former name of the professional wrestling company WWE, Inc.

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