

Administration of Barack Obama, 2013

Remarks at the Gridiron Club Dinner

March 9, 2013

Before I begin, I know some of you have noticed that I'm dressed a little differently from the other gentlemen. Because of sequester, they cut my tails. My joke writers have been placed on furlough. *[Laughter]* I know a lot of you reported that no one will feel any immediate impact because of the sequester. Well, you're about to find out how wrong you are. *[Laughter]*

Of course, there's one thing in Washington that didn't get cut: the length of this dinner. Yet more proof that the sequester makes no sense. *[Laughter]*

As you know, I last attended the Gridiron dinner 2 years ago. Back then, I addressed a number of topics: a dysfunctional Congress, a looming budget crisis, complaints that I don't spend enough time with the press. It's funny, it seems like it was just yesterday. *[Laughter]*

We noticed that some folks couldn't make it this evening. It's been noted that Bob Woodward sends his regrets, which Gene Sperling predicted. *[Laughter]* I have to admit this whole brouhaha had me a little surprised. Who knew Gene could be so intimidating? Or let me phrase it differently: Who knew anybody named Gene could be this intimidating? *[Laughter]*

Now, I know that some folks think we responded to Woodward too aggressively. But hey, when has—can anybody tell me when an administration has ever regretted picking a fight with Bob Woodward? What's the worst that could happen? *[Laughter]*

But don't worry. We're all friends again in the spirit of that wonderful song. As you may have heard, Bob invited Gene over to his place. And Bob says he actually thinks that I should make it too. And I might take him up on the offer. I mean, nothing says "not a threat" like showing up at somebody's house with guys with machine guns. *[Laughter]*

Now, since I don't often speak to a room full of journalists, I thought I should address a few concerns tonight. *[Laughter]* Some of you have said that I'm ignoring the Washington press corps, that we're too controlling. You know what, you were right. I was wrong, and I want to apologize in a video you can watch exclusively at whitehouse.gov. *[Laughter]*

While we're on this subject, I want to acknowledge Ed Henry, who is here—who is the fearless leader of the Washington press corps now. And at Ed's request, tonight I will take one question from the press. Jay, do we have a question? *[Laughter]* Surprisingly, it's a question from Ed Henry. *[Laughter]* "Mr. President, will you be taking any questions tonight?" *[Laughter]* I'm happy to answer that. No, Ed, I will not. *[Laughter]*

I also want to recognize David Corn. He's here from Mother Jones magazine. He brought his iPhone. So, Bobby Jindal, if you thought your remarks were off the record, ask Mitt Romney about that.

I have to say, I thought Bobby was incredibly funny this evening. I thought he was terrific. Amy Klobuchar was sparkling and fantastic and fabulous. I am worried about Al Franken though. *[Laughter]* How do you start off being one of the original writers for "Saturday Night Live" and end up being the second funniest Senator in Minnesota? *[Laughter]* How the mighty have fallen. *[Laughter]*

Now, I'm sure that you've noticed that there's somebody very special in my life who is missing tonight, somebody who has always got my back, stands with me no matter what, and gives me hope no matter how dark things seem. So tonight I want to publicly thank my rock, my foundation, thank you, Nate Silver. *[Laughter]*

Of course, as I begin my second term, our country is still facing enormous challenges. We have a lot of work to do.

[At this point, the President took a sip of water.]

That, Marco Rubio, is how you take a sip of water. *[Laughter]*

As I was saying, we face major challenges. March, in particular, is going to be full of tough decisions. But I want to assure you, I have my top advisers working around the clock. After all, my March Madness bracket isn't going to fill itself out. *[Laughter]* And don't worry, there is an entire team in the Situation Room as we speak, planning my next golf outing, right now at this moment. *[Laughter]*

But those aren't the only issues on my mind. As you are aware—as has been noted this evening—we've had to make some very tough, huge budget cuts, apparently with no regard to long-term consequences, which means I know how you feel in journalism. *[Laughter]* I've been trying to explain this situation to the American people, but clearly I am not perfect. After a very public mixup last week, my communications team has provided me with an easy way to distinguish between "Star Trek" and "Star Wars." Spock is what Maureen Dowd calls me. Darth Vader is what John Boehner calls me. *[Laughter]*

Of course, maintaining credibility in this cynical atmosphere is harder than ever, incredibly challenging. My administration recently put out a photo of me skeet shooting, and even that wasn't enough for some people. Next week, we're releasing a photo of me clinging to religion. *[Laughter]*

I'm also doing what I can to smooth things over with Republicans in Congress. In fact, these days, John McCain and I are spending so much time together that he told me we were becoming friends. I said: "John, stop. Chuck Hagel warned me how this ends up." *[Laughter]*

It took a while, but I'm glad that the Senate finally confirmed my Secretary of Defense. And I have to say, I don't know what happened to Chuck in those hearings. I know he worked hard; he studied his brief. And I even lent him my Presidential debate team to work with him. *[Laughter]* It's confusing what happened.

But all these changes to my team are tough to handle, I've got to admit. After 9 years, I finally said goodbye to my chief speechwriter, Jon Favreau. I watched him grow up. He's almost like a son to me, he's been with me so long. And I said to him when he first informed me of his decision, I said, "Favs, you can't leave." And he answered with three simple words: "Yes I can." *[Laughter]* Fortunately, he did not take the prompter on his way out. That would have been a problem. *[Laughter]*

With all these new faces, it's hard to keep track of who is in, who is out. And I know it's difficult for you guys as reporters. But I can offer you an easy way of remembering the new team. If Ted Cruz calls somebody a communist, then you know they're in my Cabinet. *[Laughter]*

Jack Lew is getting started on his new role as Treasury Secretary. Jack is so low key, he makes Tim Geithner look like Tom Cruise. [Laughter] Don't worry, everybody, Jack signed off on that joke, or a 5-year-old drew a Slinky. [Laughter] I don't know which.

Another big change has been at the State Department. Everybody has noticed that obviously. And let's face it: Hillary is a tough act to follow. But John Kerry is doing great so far. He is doing everything he can to ensure continuity. Frankly, though, I think it's time for him to stop showing up at work in pantsuits. It's a disturbing image. [Laughter] It really is. I don't know where he buys them. He is a tall guy. [Laughter]

And even though I'm just beginning my second term, I know that some folks are looking ahead to bigger things. Look, it's no secret that my Vice President is still ambitious. But let's face it, his age is an issue. Just the other day, I had to take Joe aside and say, "Joe, you are way too young to be the Pope." [Laughter] "You can't do it. You got to mature a little bit." [Laughter]

Now, I do want to end on a serious note. I know that there are people who get frustrated with the way journalism is practiced these days. And sometimes those people are me. [Laughter] But the truth is, our country needs you and our democracy needs you.

In an age when all it takes to attract attention is a Twitter handle and some followers, it's easier than ever to get it wrong. But it's more important than ever to get it right. And I am grateful for all the journalists who do one of the toughest jobs there is with integrity and insight and dedication—and a sense of purpose—that goes beyond a business model or a news cycle.

This year alone, reporters have exposed corruption here at home and around the world. They've risked everything to bring us stories from places like Syria and Kenya, stories that need to be told. And they've helped people understand the ways in which we're all connected: how something that happens or doesn't happen halfway around the world or here in Washington can have consequences for American families.

These are extraordinary times. The stakes are high and the tensions can sometimes be high as well. But while we'll always have disagreements, I believe that we share the belief that a free press—a press that questions us, that holds us accountable, that sometimes gets under our skin—is absolutely an essential part of our democracy.

So I want to thank everybody for not just a wonderful evening—and, Chuck, I want to thank you for your outstanding presidency—but I also just want to thank you for the work that you do each and every day. And in the words of one of my favorite "Star Trek" characters, Captain James T. Kirk of the USS *Enterprise*, "May the force be with you." [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:03 p.m. in the grand ballroom at the Renaissance Washington, DC Downtown Hotel. In his remarks, he referred to Robert U. Woodward, former Washington Post reporter; Edward M. Henry, chief White House correspondent, FOX News, in his capacity as president of the White House Correspondents' Association; White House Press Secretary James F. "Jay" Carney; Gov. Piyush "Bobby" Jindal of Louisiana; W. Mitt Romney, 2012 Republican Presidential nominee; Nathaniel R. Silver, statistician and polling analyst, and Maureen B. Dowd, columnist, the New York Times; Sen. R. Edward Cruz; former Secretary of the Treasury Timothy F. Geithner; Tom Cruise, actor; former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; and Charles D. Todd, chief White House correspondent, NBC News, in his capacity as president of the Gridiron Club and Foundation Washington, DC. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Gridiron Club dinner.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Boehner, John A.; Carney, James F. "Jay"; Clinton, Hillary Rodham; Corn, David; Cruise, Tom; Cruz, R. Edward; Dowd, Maureen B.; Favreau, Jonathan E.; Franken, Alan S.; Geithner, Timothy F.; Hagel, Charles T.; Henry, Edward M.; Jindal, Piyush "Bobby"; Kerry, John F.; Klobuchar, Amy J.; Lew, Jacob J. "Jack"; McCain, John S., III; Romney, W. Mitt; Rubio, Marco A.; Silver, Nathaniel R.; Sperling, Eugene B.; Todd, Charles D.; Woodward, Robert U.

Subjects: Budget, Federal : Deficit and national debt; Budget, Federal : Government programs, spending reductions; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Defense, Department of : Secretary; Gridiron Club and Foundation Washington, DC; Louisiana : Governor; State, Department of : Secretary; Treasury, Department of the : Secretary; White House Correspondents' Association; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Press Secretary; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: Speechwriting; White House Office : Economic Council, National; White House Office : Vice President.

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