

Remarks to Women Members of Congress and an Exchange With Reporters
March 12, 2014

The President. Well, it's an honor for me to welcome these outstanding women Members of Congress.

And I think that over the last several weeks and months, what the American people have seen is my single most important priority domestically is to make sure that everybody in this country has opportunity, that if you're willing to work hard and take responsibility, you can make it. At a time when the economy is growing, at a time when corporate profits are high and the stock market is doing well, we want to make sure that everybody is benefiting from that growth, because what we know is, when everybody has opportunity, when everybody is on the field, America's economy grows faster, the middle class expands, and that in turn fosters more growth.

Now, recently, my economic team did a report that delivered some good news. It turns out that women are succeeding in colleges and graduate education like never before. They are more represented in professions and occupations that previously they were restricted from participating in. And what we've seen in our own families and our own lives is that there are doors that have been opened to women that previously were closed.

And yet, despite that progress, despite that good news, what we also know is, women are still making 77 cents on the dollar, including when they enter into these high-paying professions, they're making less money. We know that women continue to be disproportionately represented in low-wage professions, which means that something like an increase in the Federal minimum wage is going to have a disproportionate impact on them. And women are still the ones that are carrying the greatest burden when it comes to trying to balance family and work. Because of inadequate childcare or the inability to get paid leave for a sick child or an ailing parent, they end up suffering the burdens, and by the way, that means families are suffering the burden, because, increasingly, women are a critical breadwinner for families all across the country.

So it is with that in mind that we've been working on—many of the women who are here today and other Members of Congress—on organizing a White House Summit on Working Families that is going to take place this summer on June 23. And this will give us an opportunity to build on the work that we're doing here in the White House around issues like minimum wage, around issues like family leave, around issues like equal pay. But we're also going to be able to invite other stakeholders, folks outside of Washington, people who are able to tell their story, talk about their experiences—Governors and mayors, business leaders—all of whom can work together with us to make sure that we're advancing not just the interests of women, but the interests of families and the interests of the middle class and people who are trying to get into the middle class.

So I'm tremendously grateful for the leadership that the Members of Congress have already shown on this issue. I am proud that we have taken some initiatives on our own, because sometimes, Congress is a little stubborn about these issues, at least some of our good friends on the other side of the aisle. But we're going to keep on pressing. Because if we work together, this is a great opportunity for the United States to take some leaps forward.

One of our greatest strengths, by the way, is that, compared to some other countries, our participation of women in the workforce gives us a potential economic advantage. But we've got to make sure that we're actually fulfilling that promise, and that's what this conference will be all about, this summit will be all about during this summer.

So with that, I'd like to have the two women seated next to me just make brief remarks. First of all, our outstanding leader of the Democrats in the House and first female Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi. And she will be followed by somebody who has been doing a lot of work on budget stuff, but understands also family budgets and why this is so important, Senator Patty Murray.

So, Nancy.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for bringing us together. Thank you for your leadership on the White House Summit for Working Families. As you know, the House and Senate women have been working on our agendas in this regard, reflecting the values and the approaches you have put forth. Also thank you for mentioning in the State of the Union, when women succeed, America succeeds. Our—it's not a slogan, it's a statement of fact. *[Laughter]* That's why when you talk you about paycheck fairness or you talk about paid sick leave and the work-family balance and you talk about early childhood learning, you have initiatives in all of these areas. And as you said at the end, it's really important—not just for women and families and men, but for our economy—that women succeed.

So thank you for inviting us to talk about how we go forward with the summit, and thank you for being out there on this, and thank Michelle too. *[Laughter]*

The President. She's on me about this all the time. *[Laughter]*

Leader Pelosi. Thank you, Mr. President.

Senator Patricia L. Murray. As she should be. *[Laughter]*

Mr. President, thank you so much. We are delighted to join you at this really important discussion along with Leader Pelosi and all of our colleagues to talk about one of the most important issues facing our economy today, and that is the ability for women in America to have the kinds of opportunities to participate and really help grow our economy.

You mentioned that women earn 77 cents on the dollar. If you put that another way, women work for free until April Fool's Day, and then we get our first check. And that is an economic issue to women in America and one that we're going to be addressing in the Senate very soon along with raising the minimum wage, which affects two-thirds of the people on minimum wage, as working women.

The other issues that you're talking about are so important to families, whether it's childcare or family leave, the policies that affect our families, affect the ability of a woman to do the best job. You as a woman do a good job at work if you know your kids are okay; we were just talking about that. And we want to make sure that we address that broad range of issues to help make sure that we help this economy grow and prosper and really appreciate your leadership.

The President. Fantastic. Thank you very much, everybody.

Senate Intelligence Committee Report on Central Intelligence Agency Interrogation Techniques

Q. Are you concerned about Senator—the CIA was spying on the Senate?

The President. I'll just say a quick statement on the CIA issue. The first day I came into office, I ended the practices that are subject to the investigation by the Senate Committee and have been very clear that I believe they were contrary to our values as a country.

Since that time, we have worked with the Senate Committee so that the report that they are putting forward is well informed, and what I've said is that I am absolutely committed to declassifying that report as soon as the report is completed. In fact, I would urge them to go ahead and complete the report, send it to us. We will declassify those findings so that the American people can understand what happened in the past, and that can help guide us as we move forward.

With respect to the issues that are going back and forth between the Senate Committee and the CIA, John Brennan has referred them to the appropriate authorities, and they are looking into it. And that's not something that is an appropriate role for me and the White House to wade into at this point.

But the one thing that I want to emphasize is the substantive issue, which is how do we operate even when we're threatened, even when we've gone through extraordinary trauma, has to be consistent with rule of law and our values. And I acted on that on the first day, and that hasn't changed.

All right? Thanks very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:17 p.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

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