

Administration of Barack Obama, 2015

**Remarks Honoring the 2014 Women's National Basketball Association
Champion Phoenix Mercury**

August 26, 2015

The President. Hello, everybody. Well, welcome to the White House. Congratulations to the 2014 WNBA Champion, Phoenix Mercury! And I want to acknowledge WNBA President Laurel Richie—Laurel—and WNBA Coach of the Year Sandy Brondello. [*Applause*] Yay!

I would be happy to be here, except that the Mercury getting here involved beating the Chicago Sky in the finals. [*Laughter*] In fact, Diana, backstage, was trash-talking me. [*Laughter*] You have kept yet another Chicago sports team from getting into the White House. [*Laughter*] But there's always next year.

It's been a while since the Mercury last visited here 5 years ago. And in that time, this team has appeared in four more Western Conference Finals. Last year, they cracked the code again. Last season, the Mercury set a WNBA record with 29 regular season wins. And obviously, their fans had their backs; Phoenix had the highest attendance rate in the league.

In the Western Conference finals, they got some payback against their archrivals, the Minnesota Lynx, and set themselves up for the championship. But it was not always easy. Brittney Griner had a breakout season; we expected that after having seen her at Baylor. And she was tearing it up in the playoffs before going down with an injury in the finals. So, in the clinching game, the rest of the team had to step up. And so Diana Taurasi was good for 24 points; she apparently can shoot the ball pretty good. [*Laughter*] With less than a minute to go, the game tied at 82, she put the Mercury ahead for good. As Coach Brondello says about Diana, "When you put the ball in her hands, in the money, crunch time, she makes things happen."

So these are some outstanding basketball players—Diana and Brittney, but also Candice Dupree, DeWanna Bonner, Erin Phillips, and Penny Taylor, who sealed the championship with two clutch free throws. Penny said that: "Nobody is left out of anything on the Mercury. Everybody has to listen, everybody is involved, one through 11."

And that sense of teamwork extends to the work that they're doing in the Phoenix community as well. These women have spent more than 150 hours cleaning up courts and running basketball clinics for underserved kids and working with high school basketball teams that they adopt every year. And during the playoffs—

[*At this point, a baby cried.*]

The President. That's okay, it's an excited fan. [*Laughter*] And during the playoffs, the Mercury raised awareness for the national bone marrow donor registry by enlisting an honorary assistant coach named Mia McPoland, a 12-year-old who's waiting and hoping to find a donor.

So this is a team that I think is representative of what the WNBA is all about. They're doing good in their community. They're great athletes. They and women across the WNBA are changing the way that young girls, including my daughters, see themselves. And as a dad, I've witnessed the shift just in the last 10 years, 15 years, 20 years, in terms of it just being taken for granted that women are great athletes and great leaders. And that does not happen unless

these outstanding women perform the way they do. Plus, they look so good. [*Laughter*] You know? They clean up pretty good.

And so I am very pleased to congratulate this outstanding team behind me, not only for winning a championship, but for being great representatives of not only the WNBA, but of basketball as a whole.

And with that, I think Diana has a few words that she's going to say. And I just want to warn—last year, somebody slipped off the podium wearing high heels. [*Laughter*] So I want you—so I just—before anything else happens. She saved herself. I was impressed because she was coming off the second riser. But it was a little stressful. So all right, Diana, come on.

Guard Diana L. Taurasi. Well, on behalf of the Phoenix Mercury and the WNBA, we want to give you a 2014 WNBA Championship jersey.

The President. Nice!

Ms. Taurasi. It's an XL. [*Laughter*] So we might have to get on the Atkins. But thank you very much for having us, Mr. President.

[*At this point, the President was presented with a team jersey.*]

The President. Thank you so much.

Ms. Taurasi. It's an honor.

The President. Thank you. You bet. Thank you. Let's strike this podium.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Brittney Griner, center, Candice Dupree and Penelope J. Taylor, forwards, DeWanna Bonner, guard/forward, and Erin V. Phillips, former guard, Phoenix Mercury.

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