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who were there for us when we needed it most: who pushed us when we were afraid; who pulled us back when we were headed in the wrong direction; who refused to give up on us, no matter how difficult we were. I know that's certainly true for me. I was telling Tony and his family in the office, Michelle and I don't come from a fancy background. The only reason that we're here is because at some point there were people like Tony who helped steer us in the right direction.

In recognizing Tony and all of you today, we're also recognizing countless others who make the lives of our young people a little bit better. And for that, we honor you, we thank you, today and every single day.

So Tony Mullen, God bless you and God bless the United States of America. Give Tony a big round of applause.

[*At this point, Mr. Mullen made brief remarks.*]

Well, thank you everybody. And with that, enjoy the day. I'm going to shake a few hands, and I'm sure the First Lady will as well.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:25 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Jill Biden, wife of Vice President Joe Biden; Rep. James A. Himes; and his sister Maya Soetoro-Ng. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Tony Mullen, 2009 Teacher of the Year.

Statement on Congressional Action on Hate Crimes Prevention Legislation
April 28, 2009

This week the House of Representatives is expected to consider H.R. 1913, the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009. I urge Members on both sides of the aisle to act on this important civil rights issue by passing this legislation to protect all of our citizens from violent acts of intolerance, legislation that will enhance civil rights protections, while also protecting our freedom of speech and association. I also urge the Senate to work with my administration to finalize this bill and to take swift action.

Remarks at a Swearing-In Ceremony for Kathleen Sebelius as Secretary of Health and Human Services
April 28, 2009

The President. Congratulations, Madam Secretary.

Secretary of Health and Human Services Kathleen Sebelius. Thank you, sir.

The President. Here we go. We're just going to make a brief statement. I am thrilled to have Kathleen Sebelius as my new Secretary of Health and Human Services.

Obviously, we have a lot to do to make sure that health care is affordable for the American people, to deal with critical issues like food safety. But we wanted to swear her in right away because we've got a significant public health challenge that requires her immediate attention, and that is the H1N1 flu outbreak that we've seen initially in Mexico and we now see over a dozen cases here in the United States.

It is something that we have to monitor very carefully. The officials who have been in charge, including the Acting Director at the CDC, those at Department of Homeland Security, have done an outstanding job, a superb job, in managing the situation up to this point.

But we need all hands on deck, and so I am thrilled that we have Secretary Sebelius taking the reins. She is going to be immediately briefed on the issues that we're working on right now. I expect her to hit the ground running, and I have every confidence that given

her experience as a Governor who's managed crises before, who's worked on public health issues since she's been in public life, she is the right person at the right time for the job.

So congratulations. We are thrilled, and you are going to do a great job.

Secretary Sebelius. Thank you, sir. Honored to serve.

The President. Thank you.

All right, thanks, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 8:02 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Richard E. Besser, Acting Director, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 29.

Remarks on Senator Arlen Specter's Decision to Join the Senate Democratic Caucus

April 29, 2009

The President. Good morning, everybody.

Vice President Joe Biden. Mr. President, as we used to say in the Senate, I hope you'll excuse a point of personal privilege here. Arlen Specter has been my friend and my confidant and my partner, and I his partner, in scores and scores of major, major pieces of legislation and issues for a long time. And beyond that, Mr. President, he's been there for me every time things have been tough for me, and I hope I have been there for him.

And it gives me great pleasure, great pleasure, Mr. President, to now officially be in the same caucus with Arlen Specter. We've ridden the train for so many years, we've visited each other's homes, our families, that it's just, as, again, a point of personal privilege, it's just a delight to have no separation.

[*At this point, Vice President Biden made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

So, Mr. President, I am pleased to introduce a man of immense personal courage and unmatched integrity, my friend, Arlen Specter.

Sen. Arlen Specter. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Vice President, and thank you, Mr. President, for your support and encouragement.

I was unwilling to subject my 29-year record in the United States Senate to the Pennsylvania Republican primary electorate, but I am pleased to run in the primary on the Democratic ticket and am ready, willing, and anxious to take on all comers in a general election.

I have not represented the Republican Party; I have represented the people of Pennsylvania. And I will continue to do just that. As I said yesterday, I will not be an automatic 60th vote. There have been positions, which I talked about yesterday and will not reenumerate, where I stand in a different position from the traditional position of the Democrats, and I will continue that independence.

[*Sen. Specter made brief remarks, concluding as follows.*]

When I talked to the President yesterday, I said, "I haven't seen you in the elevator lately." His office used to be right down the hall from mine on the seventh floor of the Hart Building, and he hadn't come back lately, so I said I was calling him up just to chit-chat. And I got to know the President to some extent in the Senate. I talked too long already, but that's—Joe taught me how to do that.

Just one personal comment: The President approached me when he was Senator Obama, before the Democratic primary. And he said, "Tell me, Arlen, if a Jewish kid from Kansas can carry Pennsylvania, how can a black kid from Kansas carry Pennsylvania?" And I gave him some advice, and he became—[*laughter*]—he became President of the United States of America.

The President. That's how it worked. Thank you so much, Arlen. Thank you.

Well, let me start off by just saying I'm thrilled to have Arlen in the Democratic Caucus. I have told him that he will have my full