

you guys. [Laughter] Why did health care take so long? And we didn't get our public option—[laughter]—you know, it's like, you know, what are we doing about this energy thing? It's not happening fast enough. And look, small business—you know. [Laughter]

I know all of you—I've got a couple thousand political consultants here. [Laughter] And sometimes—oh, you know, how come Obama's not communicating properly? And it's like we're—they're—we're—and their narrative, and we have to—you know, I see your comments. [Laughter] And you look wistfully at the poster and—[laughter]—you remember that day in Iowa. [Laughter] I know. [Laughter] Then your friends come and talk to you and—oh, Obama's changed. He's—[laughter].

Audience member. I love you, Mr. President!

The President. But what I'm saying—we know this wasn't going to be easy, though. A journey like this one, we knew there were going to be setbacks and detours and times when we stumbled. People act like—sometimes, I read folks talking about how his campaign was so brilliant and so smooth. These people weren't on the campaign. [Laughter] I remember us screwing up all the time during the campaign. [Laughter]

But as is true in the campaign, so has it been true for America that each and every juncture in our history, when our future was on the line,

when we hit that fork in the road, we came together. We solved our problems. We transformed ourselves from an agricultural economy to an industrial economy to an information economy. We absorbed new waves of immigrants. We made sure that we finally eradicated the stain of slavery and made sure that women were full participants in our democracy. We managed to move forward not as Republicans or Democrats, but as Americans, as one people and as one Nation.

So when you hear people saying, well, our problems are insoluble, when you confront the cynicism of others or sometimes your own, I just want you to think about all the progress we've already made. I want you to think about all of the business that we've got ahead of us. I want you to remember those words that summed up what we've been about and the commitment we made to each other: Yes, we can.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:49 p.m. at the Town Hall. In his remarks, he referred to talk show host Oprah Winfrey; and James A. Messina, manager, Obama 2012 reelection campaign. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on April 28.

Remarks Announcing National Security Team Personnel Changes April 28, 2011

Tornado Damage in the Southeast

Everybody, please have a seat.

Good afternoon, everybody. I want to begin by saying a few words about the devastating storms that have ripped through the southeastern United States. The loss of life has been heartbreaking, especially in Alabama. In a matter of hours, these deadly tornadoes, some of the worst that we've seen in decades, took mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, friends and neighbors, even entire communities. Others are injured, and some are still missing, and in many places, the damage to

homes and businesses is nothing short of catastrophic.

We can't control when or where a terrible storm may strike, but we can control how we respond to it. And I want every American who has been affected by this disaster to know that the Federal Government will do everything we can to help you recover. And we will stand with you as you rebuild.

I've already spoken to the Governors of Alabama, Virginia, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Georgia, and I've let them know that we are ready to help in any possible way.

I've declared a state of emergency in Alabama so that we can make all necessary resources available to that State. I've dispatched Federal Emergency Management Agency Administrator Craig Fugate to Alabama so that he can personally work with State and local officials, and I will travel myself to Alabama tomorrow to meet with those leading the response efforts as well as the families who are reeling from this disaster.

I also want to commend all the men and women who have been working around the clock for the last few days to save the lives of their friends and neighbors and to begin the long work of rebuilding these communities. These police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and other emergency responders are heroes, and they have the thanks of a grateful nation. We pray for their success, and we stand with every American affected by this disaster in the days and weeks to come.

National Security Team Personnel Changes

Now, as we meet our obligations to these Americans, we're mindful of our obligation to the safety of all Americans, and that's why we're here today. As Commander in Chief, I have no greater responsibility than the security of the American people and the well-being of our courageous men and women in uniform and their families.

Over the past 2 years, my administration has done whatever it takes to meet these responsibilities. We've been relentless against Al Qaida and its affiliates, preventing terrorist attacks and saving lives. We brought nearly 100,000 troops out of Iraq in an orderly way. We ended our combat mission. And we refocused on Afghanistan, where we're breaking the Taliban's momentum and training Afghan forces. And from Europe to Asia, we've strengthened old alliances, forged new partnerships, and restored American leadership in the world.

Still, we confront urgent challenges. In Iraq, we're working to bring the rest of our troops home as Iraqis secure their democracy. In Afghanistan, we're moving into a new phase, transferring responsibility for security to Afghan forces, starting to reduce American forces

this summer, and building a long-term partnership with the Afghan people.

As people across the Middle East and North Africa seek to determine their own destiny, we must ensure that America stands with those who seek their universal rights, and that includes continuing to support the international effort to protect the Libyan people. And here at home, as we make the hard decisions that are needed to reduce America's debt, we cannot compromise our ability to defend our Nation or our interests around the world.

These are some of the pressing challenges that we must meet in the pivotal days ahead, and today I am proud to announce key members of my national security team, who, along with Vice President Biden and Secretary Clinton, will help us meet them.

I've worked closely with most of the individuals on this stage, and all of them have my complete confidence. They are leaders of enormous integrity and talent, who've devoted their lives to keeping our Nation strong and secure. And I am personally very, very grateful to each of them for accepting these new assignments.

Given the pivotal period that we're entering, I felt that it was absolutely critical that we had this team in place so that we can stay focused on our missions, maintain our momentum, and keep our Nation secure.

When I took office, Bob Gates had already served under seven Presidents, and he carried a clock that counted down the days—[laughter]—hours and minutes until he could return to Washington State with his wife Becky. I was able to convince him to stay for 1 more year—or I was able to convince him to talk to Becky about staying 1 more year. [Laughter] At some point along the way, Bob threw out that clock. He is now one of the longest serving Defense Secretaries in American history. And as a grateful nation, we can all agree that Bob has more than earned the right to return to private life, which he has decided to do at the end of June.

I'll have more to say about Secretary Gates's exemplary service in the days to come, but today every American must know that because he helped to responsibly wind down the war in

Iraq, we're in a better position to support our troops and manage the transition in Afghanistan. Because he challenged conventional thinking, our troops have the lifesaving equipment they need and our military is better prepared for today's wars. And because he courageously cut unnecessary spending, we'll save hundreds of billions of dollars that can be invested in the 21st-century military that our troops deserve.

I am confident Bob Gates will be remembered as one of the finest Defense Secretaries in American history. And I will always be grateful for his service.

I'm equally confident that Bob's reform agenda will be carried out by another great public servant of our time, Leon Panetta. Leon appreciates the struggles and sacrifices of our troops and military families because he served in the Army himself and because he and his wife Sylvia are proud parents of a son who served in Afghanistan. And just as Leon earned the trust and respect of our intelligence professionals at the CIA by listening to them and fighting fiercely on their behalf, I know he'll do the same for our Armed Forces and their families.

The patriotism and extraordinary management skills that have defined Leon's four decades of service is exactly what we need in our next Secretary of Defense. As a former Congressman and White House Chief of Staff, Leon knows how to lead, which is why he is held in such high esteem not only in this city, but around the world. As a CIA Director who's played a decisive role in our fight against violent extremism, he understands that even as we begin the transition in Afghanistan, we must remain unwavering in our fight against Al Qaida. And as a former OMB Director, he'll ensure that even as we make tough budget decisions, we'll maintain our military superiority and keep our military the very best in the world.

Leon, I know that you've been looking forward to returning home to Sylvia and your beautiful Monterey, so I thank you for taking on yet another assignment for our country—and I hope you don't have a clock. [*Laughter*]

I'm also very pleased that Leon's work at the CIA will be carried on by one of our leading strategic thinkers and one of the finest military officers of our time, General David Petraeus. This is the second time in a year that I've asked General Petraeus to take on a demanding assignment. And I know this one carries a special sacrifice for him and his wife Holly. After nearly 40 years in uniform, including leading American and coalition forces in some of the most challenging military missions since 9/11, David Petraeus will retire from the Army that he loves to become the next CIA Director, effective early September, pending Senate confirmation.

As a lifelong consumer of intelligence, he knows that intelligence must be timely, accurate, and acted upon quickly. He understands that staying a step ahead of nimble adversaries requires sharing and coordinating information, including with my Director of National Intelligence, Jim Clapper.

And even as he and the CIA confront a full range of threats, David's extraordinary knowledge of the Middle East and Afghanistan uniquely positions him to lead the agency in its effort to defeat Al Qaida.

In short, just as General Petraeus changed the way that our military fights and wins wars in the 21st century, I have no doubt that Director Petraeus will guide our intelligence professionals as they continue to adapt and innovate in an ever-changing world.

Finally, I'm pleased to announce my choice for the civilian-military team that will lead our efforts in Afghanistan in this year of transition. I'm nominating a superb commander, Lieutenant General John Allen, to succeed General Petraeus as Commander of the International Security Assistance Force or ISAF.

As a battle-tested combat leader in Iraq, he helped turn the tide in Anbar Province. As deputy commander of Central Command, he's respected in the region and has been deeply involved in planning and executing our strategy in Afghanistan. As our troops continue to sacrifice for our security—as we tragically saw again yesterday—General Allen is the right commander for this vital mission.

As coalition forces transfer responsibility to Afghans, we're redoubling our efforts to promote political and economic progress in Afghanistan as well. Our tireless Ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, has helped us dramatically increase our civilian presence of diplomats and development experts. Never before have our civilians and troops worked together so closely and so successfully. And I've personally relied on Karl's candid advice on this incredibly complex mission.

After 2 years in one of the world's most challenging posts, Ambassador Eikenberry's time in Afghanistan is coming to an end. He's hard at work in Kabul today. And I want to thank Karl and his wife Ching for their outstanding service.

To build on Karl's great work, I'm very grateful that one of our Nation's most respected diplomats, Ryan Crocker, has agreed to return to public service as our next Ambassador to Afghanistan. This is a five-time Ambassador, and Ryan is no stranger to tough assignments. Few Americans know this region and its challenges better than Ambassador Crocker.

He was our first Envoy to Afghanistan after the fall of the Taliban. He reopened our Embassy there. As a former Ambassador to Pakistan, he recognizes that our strategy has to succeed on both sides of the border. As Ambassador to Iraq, his remarkable partnership with David Petraeus helped to reduce the level of violence, promote reconciliation, and shift from the military surge to a political effort and a long-term partnership between our two countries.

This is exactly what is needed now in Afghanistan, where Ambassador Crocker will work with our new Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, Marc Grossman. And I want to thank Ryan and his wife Christine—a decorated former Foreign Service officer herself—for agreeing to serve our Nation once more.

So Leon Panetta at the Defense Department, David Petraeus at the CIA, Ambassador Crocker and General John Allen in Afghanistan—these are the leaders that I've chosen to help guide us through the difficult days ahead.

I will look to them and my entire national security team for their counsel, continuity, and unity of effort that this moment in history demands. And our people on the frontlines—our brave troops, our outstanding intelligence personnel, our dedicated diplomats—will look to them for the leadership that success requires.

I urge our friends in the Senate to confirm these individuals as swiftly as possible so they can assume their duties and help meet the urgent challenges we confront as a nation. We are a nation still at war. And joined by the leaders alongside me today, I will continue to do everything in my power as Commander in Chief to keep our Nation strong and the American people safe.

With that, I'd like to invite each of these leaders to say a few words. I'm actually going to start with Bob Gates.

[At this point, Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates; Director of Central Intelligence Leon E. Panetta; Gen. David H. Petraeus, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; Lt. Gen. John R. Allen, USMC, deputy commander, U.S. Central Command; and U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Ryan C. Crocker each made brief remarks.]

I cannot think of a group of individuals better suited to lead our national security team during this difficult time. While I'm up here, I think it's important to acknowledge the extraordinary work that my Vice President and my Secretary of State and my National Security Adviser have done as well. This is going to be an outstanding team. I'm grateful for the service that they've already provided, and I'm confident that they will continue to do everything that they can to ensure America's safety and security not just today, but tomorrow.

Let me also just briefly thank their teams, some of whom are going to be shuffling their own lives. Whether it's at the CIA or in Afghanistan, all of you have done outstanding work, and I'm grateful for your service to our Nation.

And once again, let me thank the families of the individuals here. All of them make extraordinary sacrifices. Michelle can attest to that. *[Laughter]* And we know that none of us

could be successful were it not for your extraordinary support. So thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:13 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Robert J. Bentley of

Alabama; Gov. Robert F. McDonnell of Virginia; Gov. Haley R. Barbour of Mississippi; Gov. William E. Haslam of Tennessee; Gov. J. Nathan Deal of Georgia; and Lt. James Panetta, USN, son of Director of Central Intelligence Leon E. Panetta.

Remarks Following a Meeting With President Ricardo Martinelli Berrocal of Panama

April 28, 2011

President Obama. Well, I want to welcome President Martinelli to the Oval Office, to the White House. As I think all of you know, the relationship between the United States and Panama is a historical relationship and a strong friendship that isn't just at the government level, but it is the person-to-person level.

Obviously, there are a lot of Panamanian Americans who live here. At the same time, President Martinelli was just informing me that 7 percent of the Panamanian population is from the United States. And so that constant contact between people, I think, is part of what has made us such strong friends and allies for generations.

Also, obviously, we share an interest in baseball. And if, Mr. President, you have somebody who's the next Mariano Rivera, make sure they go to the Chicago White Sox.

President Martinelli. The White Sox, not the Yankees. [Laughter]

President Obama. Not the Yankees. They've had enough. In building on that friendship, we've discussed a wide range of issues in our meeting today. Obviously, one of the most important ones is how do we grow the economies of both countries. And in that regard, we are very pleased by the progress that we've made in moving forward a U.S.-Panamanian free trade agreement.

Thanks to the leadership of President Martinelli, there have been a range of significant reforms in banking and taxation in Panama. And we are confident now that a free trade agreement would be good for our country, would create jobs here in the United States, open up new markets with potential for billions of dollars of

cross-border trade. We think it would be also very good for Panama and allow additional economic exchanges between our two countries.

So my expectation is, is that as part of a broader trade package that we're going to be presenting to Congress, that we're going to be able to get this done. And I want to thank again President Martinelli for his leadership on this issue.

We also discussed security in the region. We have had very close cooperation between our two governments on issues of drug interdiction and dealing with the constant problem of the drug trade in Central America. And Panama has been one of the leaders that we've worked with in trying to roll back the incursion of the drug cartels into the region.

I know President Martinelli is greatly committed to this issue, and we discussed how we could cooperate together not only in the interdiction side, but also in helping other countries in the region to build up their capacity. And we think that Panama is going to be critical to the Central American Security Partnership that I've announced previously.

We also discussed some of the broader issues related to the region. We both agreed that the more we can do to showcase the success of free markets, commitments to democracy, human rights, individual liberties, freedom of the press, the more that we are highlighting those shared values between our two countries, the more successful the people of the region will be.

And so again, I just want to say to President Martinelli, thank you for your visit. Thank you for your friendship. Thank you for your leadership. The American people know that we have