

which one of us might at some point be stricken with an illness or suffer a layoff. And most of us in this room have somebody in their background who knows what it's like to fall on hard times and understand how important those safety nets are in order to get people back on their feet so they can succeed.

So we've got a lot at stake in this election. The good news is that I think we've got the truth on our side, and I think the values that we're going to be talking about over the next several months are not Democratic values or Republican values, they're American values. And I think people are going to be, once again, choosing a better future and our best traditions. That's what we're going to be fighting

for. I'm glad you guys are on the team as I go out there and do that.

So thank you very much.

NOTE: The President spoke at 7:37 p.m. at the residence of Denise Ilitch and James Scalici. In his remarks, he referred to Sam Lites and Paul Scalici, sons of Ms. Ilitch and Mr. Scalici; Gerald H. Acker and Barry J. Goodman, senior partners, Goodman Acker, P.C.; Jalen A. Rose, former guard, University of Michigan men's basketball team; and Willie W. Horton, former left fielder and designated hitter, Major League Baseball's Detroit Tigers. Audio was not available for verification of the content of these remarks.

Remarks Honoring the 2011 NCAA Football Champion University of Alabama Crimson Tide

April 19, 2012

The President. Well, good afternoon, everybody. Have a seat. Have a seat. It is my pleasure to welcome the Alabama Crimson Tide back to the White House and congratulate them on winning their 14th national championship, their second in 3 years. Roll Tide.

I told Coach he's making this a habit. [*Laughter*] I'm also happy to see the best team in DC high school football in the house. Congratulations to the other Crimson Tide—Dunbar High School—on their city championship. Might have some recruits out here, Coach.

Now, we've got a lot of proud 'Bama fans here today. It is good to see Mayor Maddox of Tuscaloosa again. Mayor Bell of Birmingham is here, as well as Members of Congress, including several Alabama alums. I also want to recognize Alabama Director of Athletics Mal Moore and Interim University President Dr. Judy Bonner for their support of the best team in college football.

Now obviously, this is a team that knows something about adversity. It was 1 year ago next week that an F4 tornado carved a path right through the town of Tuscaloosa. I traveled down there 2 days later to see the devastation with the mayor and the Governor. And

I've got to tell you, I'd never seen anything like it.

And I remember something the mayor said that day. He said that when something like that happens, folks tend to forget all their petty differences. Things like politics, religion, race, when we're confronted with a tragedy of such magnitude, all that just fades away. We're reminded that all we have is each other. And if you need proof of that, just look how the Auburn community stepped up during that time of need.

The storm took the lives of 248 people, including 6 students. And it touched this team personally. Long snapper Carson Tinker's girlfriend lost her life in the storm. And a few weeks later, there was fresh grief for Aaron Douglas, an offensive lineman who passed away. So this became a team in every sense of the word. They remembered Aaron and those lost in the storm not just with their hearts, but on their helmets, with a houndstooth ribbon and the number 77.

And then they took to the field, they steam-rolled opponent after opponent, they racked up an 8–0 record going into the rivalry game against LSU. Folks called it the “game of the

century.” The top two teams in the country, number 1 versus number 2, primetime national television. And it delivered. It was a defensive slugfest that wouldn’t be settled until overtime. In the end, one team had to lose. And ‘Bama gave up its only loss of the season.

Fortunately, they got a rematch. In the national championship game, the Tide not only beat the Tigers; they shut them out, the first in BCS championship game history. LSU earned just 5 first downs, crossed the midfield line only once, and were held to less than 100 yards.

And it wasn’t just the defense that played lights out. Kicker Jeremy Shelley nailed a bowl-record five field goals. Heisman Trophy finalist Trent Richardson rushed for the only touchdown of the game in his usual fashion, like a boulder rolling downhill. Offensive lineman Barrett Jones summed it up pretty well when he said, “We felt like we were capable of dominating, and we did that.”

So this team didn’t just shatter records. I hear the championship trophy also took a bit of a spill—[*laughter*—earlier this week.

So this was a fun season to watch, but it was also a deeply meaningful season for the Tide. And what’s even more impressive is that these young men showed that success isn’t about the individual, it’s about the ability to work as a team. That’s why senior linebacker Courtney Upshaw handed his defensive MVP award to his teammates, saying the whole defense deserved it.

That’s why Coach became the first to win three BCS national championships, but he gave credit to his players’ hard work and persistence. They played as a team because of what they had endured as a team. And so each victory was about more than getting to the title game; it was about the lives of these players and coaches that they’d carried with them and what they meant to each other.

Each of them found different ways to honor these memories. Coach Saban started a program called “13 for 30” that aims to rebuild 13 houses for families who lost theirs in the torna-

do. Strength coach Scott Cochran pitched in with players almost every Saturday helping families recover and rebuild. Courtney Upshaw raised \$20,000 in relief funds for the impacted families. And Barrett Jones lugged a chainsaw around Tuscaloosa to remove tornado debris from homes and yards. So the Tide showed us what it takes to win as a team, but they also showed what it means to be a part of a larger community: to look out for one another, to help. And that makes them pretty special.

So I just want to say to all these outstanding men and all the staff, Coach and the entire Crimson Tide community, congratulations on an extraordinary season, and best of luck next season. Who knows, I may see you again.

Thank you.

[*At this point, University of Alabama Football Head Coach Nicholas L. Saban made brief remarks and presented the President with a game jersey.*]

The President. Now, that’s a nice-looking jersey right there. [*Laughter*]

Mr. Saban. From the 2011 national champs. We would also like to give you a helmet over here. We certainly don’t want to be responsible for any head injuries that the President might have. [*Laughter*]

The President. I was mentioning yesterday, I’m probably going to need a helmet between now and November. What do you think, Shelby? [*Laughter*] Huh? All right.

Mr. Saban. Well, good. Well, we really—

The President. Thank you so much.

Mr. Saban. We really appreciate the opportunity, and thank you so much for your time to honor our team. Thank you very much.

The President. Coach, I appreciate you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:27 p.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Gov. Robert J. Bentley of Alabama; and Sen. Richard C. Shelby.