

er, I am absolutely confident that year after year we're going to see steady improvement.

I told the superintendents that I met backstage before I came out here, this is not a 1-year project. This isn't a 2-year project. This is going to take some time. But we can get it done with the kind of determination and the kind of commitment that so many of you have shown.

So I'm proud of you. I'm proud of Arne Duncan. Let's make this happen.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:57 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to White House Science Fair student participant Taylor Wilson.

## Remarks Following a Meeting With Prime Minister Mario Monti of Italy *February 9, 2012*

*President Obama.* Well, hello, everybody. *Benvenuto.* I want to welcome Prime Minister Monti to the White House for his first visit. I had the opportunity to congratulate him after he took on the extraordinary responsibilities that he has accepted.

I want to begin by saying that it's nice to be able to return the hospitality of the Italian people. Every time I've been to Rome, L'Aquila, the warmth that has been extended not just to me, but to my family has been extraordinary. And obviously, we have a deep and special connection with the Italian people. The Italian American community here in the United States has had as much of an impact as any group within our country.

I personally cannot claim Italian ancestry, although my name ends in a vowel—[laughter]—so sometimes, I try to pretend.

The Prime Minister came in at a very difficult time in Italian politics and the Italian economy. And I just want to say how much we appreciate the strong start that he has embarked on and the very effective measures that he is promoting inside of Italy. You've already seen because of his stewardship and his experience and his knowledge of economics, that not only has he boosted confidence within Italy about a reform agenda, but he's also been able to generate confidence throughout Europe and in the marketplace that Italy has a plan that takes seriously its fiscal responsibilities, but also emphasizes the need for structural reforms that can promote growth.

And so one of the topics of our conversation obviously was my continuing to encourage the fine work that has already been done by the

Prime Minister and to express our interest in doing whatever we can do to help stabilize the situation in the euro zone, including something that we both agree on, which is the need for a stronger European firewall that will allow for a more stable path for repayment of debt, but also the promotion of a growth strategy within Europe, which is obviously important not only to Europe, but the entire world economy and to our economy back here in the United States of America.

In addition to all the burdens that he has economically, Prime Minister Monti also is the leader of one of our most important friends and allies when it comes to security issues. So I emphasized to him how much we appreciate the sacrifices and outstanding work that are made by Italian forces in Afghanistan, and we reaffirmed our commitment to the Lisbon schedule in which we transition to full Afghan lead by the end of 2014.

I emphasized the fact that we could not have been successful in our Libya campaign without the extraordinary contributions of our Italian partners, and we both expressed our interest in working with the transitional government there to create a stable pathway towards democracy and economic prosperity.

We discussed the extraordinary efforts that Italian forces have taken in Kosovo to continue to maintain the peace there and to deal with ongoing tensions. And we discussed a wide range of diplomatic concerns, including the situation in Syria, where we both have a great interest in ending the outrageous bloodshed that we've seen and seeing a transition from the

current Government that has been assaulting its people.

We also discussed how we can continue to encourage a peaceful and effective transition elsewhere in the Middle East. And we discussed the situation in Iran, and I thanked Italy for its participation in a strong sanctions regime. We also both said that we would work as hard as we can to find a diplomatic resolution to that very difficult situation.

So overall, I think that the relationship between Italy and the United States has never been stronger. I personally have great confidence in the Prime Minister's leadership and his ability to navigate Italy through this difficult time and to stabilize the economic situation there and then put it on a footing so that it can grow and prosper over the long term.

And I know given the extraordinary talents and gifts of the Italian people that, with these structural reforms, there's no reason why the future for Italy will—should not be extraordinarily bright.

So, Mr. Prime Minister, welcome. We thank you very much for your friendship, and we wish you the very best in the months to come.

Thank you so much, thank you.

*Prime Minister Monti.* Mr. President, thank you so much for having me today at the White House. It is a great privilege and an honor to have the first meeting with you after our telephone conversation and to hear directly from you your vision about world affairs, and in particular, the economic cooperation and the common challenges that the U.S. and the European Union and, within it, Italy, have to tackle.

The meeting with the President has been ranging through a number of topics, as the President himself just mentioned. We of course devoted particular attention to the efforts going on in Italy. And I do wish to warmly thank the President for his generous and supportive words, which in itself are an encouragement for my Government to persist along these lines.

And I'm glad to say the lines towards budgetary consolidation and structure reforms, however painful they may be in the short term,

seem to be widely understood by the Italian public opinion. And I think this is a good basis for also the future of the country and for whatever will be there after the time-limited duration of the current government.

With President Obama, we went through the interactions that exist in Europe between the efforts by any particular member state and the overall governance of the European Union. I found in him a deep interest and, can I also say, thorough knowledge of these intricate mechanisms of us, the Europeans.

And we agreed on the strategy in order for Europe to consolidate its budgetary position, to cope with the financial tensions, and in particular, you heard the President mention the importance of adequate firewalls and also the imperative of growth, a growth which can only come, particularly in Europe, from structural transformations giving more role to productivity, enhanced efficiency.

And I think the U.S. is a very good case in point, providing examples on the benefits of well-functioning markets. And of course, the U.S. is the living example of what a single market can provide in terms of growth. And this explains why, in Europe, Italy is so insisting, finding more and more audience among the other member states on the fact that Europe's programs for growth should rely heavily on an enhanced effort for the single market.

I will not go through the various points concerning the strategic agenda, the area of security that the U.S. and Italy share. I confirmed the firm willingness of Italy to play its role within this alliance, which is a strategic alliance, but which is, first of all, an alliance of values, common values that we defend. And I promised to President Obama the renewed intention of Italy to provide not only the necessary resources and women and men for these tasks, but also the knowledge and expertise that Italy may have, as regards particularly some countries in the Mediterranean and Middle Eastern region, due to geographic and historical links.

So we are, Mr. President, and I personally am very encouraged by this thorough exchange of views. It was difficult to identify points

where there isn't agreement. But it was easy to identify points—first and foremost, economic growth—where we have common views, but we need to step up joint actions in order for our wishes to become a reality.

And finally, if I may conclude with a sentence in Italian, Mr. President.

*[At this point, Prime Minister Monti spoke in Italian, and no translation was provided. He then continued in English as follows.]*

*Prime Minister Monti.* Thank you so much, Mr. President.

*President Obama.* Thank you so much. And I apologize; I forgot my translation during my long speech. But rather than try to repeat it now, if anybody needs a translation, we've got the translator right here.

So thank you very much, Mr. Prime Minister.

*Prime Minister Monti.* Thank you, Mr. President.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:30 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House.

## Remarks at an Obama Victory Fund 2012 Fundraiser February 9, 2012

Thank you. Thank you, Laura, for the wonderful introduction, the best introduction that a Cubs fan has ever given me. *[Laughter]* The rivalry is fierce in Chicago, but I'll make an exception here.

And I want to thank Karen and Nan for opening up their incredible home. To all of you, and to everybody who helped put this together, thank you so much. I am very grateful.

I'm going to be very brief at the top, because I want to—usually, in these things, I like to spend most of my time in a conversation. I do want to acknowledge that I have as good a Cabinet as I think any President in modern history has had. And one of the stars of that Cabinet is sitting right here, Kathleen Sebelius.

All of America has gone through an incredibly difficult, wrenching time these last 3 years. And it doesn't matter whether you are Black or White, whether you are northern or southern, rich or poor, gay or straight; I think all of us have been deeply concerned over these last 3 years to making sure that our economy recovers, that we're putting people back to work, that we stabilize the financial system. The amount of hardship and challenge that ordinary families have gone through over the last 3 years has been incredible. And there are still a lot of folks hurting out there.

The good news is that we're moving in the right direction. And when I came into office,

we were losing 750,000 jobs a month, and this past month we gained 250,000. That's a million-job swing. And for the last 23 months, we've now created 3.7 million jobs. And that's more than any time since 2000—or, yes, since 2005—the number of jobs that we created last year, and more manufacturing jobs than any time since the 1990s.

So we're making progress on that front now, but we've still got a long way to go. Today we announced a housing settlement, brought about by our Attorney General and States attorneys all across the country. And as a consequence, we're going to see billions of dollars in loan modifications and help to folks who are seeing their homes underwater. And that's going to have a huge impact.

In my State of the Union, we talked about the need for American manufacturing—companies coming back, insourcing, and recognizing how incredibly productive American workers are—and our need to continue to double down on investments in clean energy and making sure that our kids are getting trained so that they are competing with any workers in the world and are also effectively equipped to be great citizens and to understand the world around them.

And we talked about the fact that we've got to have the same set of values of fair play and responsibility for everybody, whether it's Wall