

Union can be made more perfect, and our world can be repaired.

Today, it's our turn, our generation's turn, and you guys, your generation's turn. You're younger than us. [*Laughter*] We got some later generations here in the front. We're the ones who have to stand up for our shared values. Here at home, we have to rebuild an America where everybody gets a fair shot and everybody is doing their fair share and everybody is playing by the same rules.

Beyond our borders, we have to stand alongside our friends who share our commitment to freedom and democracy and universal rights, and that includes, of course, our unwavering commitment to the State of Israel and its security and the pursuit of a just and lasting peace.

It's no secret that we've got a lot of work to do, but as your traditions teach us, while we are not obligated to finish the work, neither are we free to desist from that work.

So today we don't just celebrate all that American Jews have done for our country, we also look toward the future. And as we do, I know that those of you in this room, but folks all across this country will continue to help perfect our Union, and for that, I am extraordinarily grateful.

God bless you. God bless America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:17 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. The related proclamation of May 2 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

Remarks on the Unveiling of the Official Portraits of Former President George W. Bush and First Lady Laura Bush *May 31, 2012*

Well, good afternoon, everybody. Thank you, Fred, for that introduction. To President George H.W. Bush and Barbara, to all the members of the Bush family who are here, it is a great privilege to have you here today. And to President and Mrs. Bush, welcome back to the house that you called home for 8 years.

The White House is many things at once: It's a working office; it's a living museum; it's an enduring symbol of our democracy. But at the end of the day, when the visitors go home and the lights go down, a few of us are blessed with the tremendous honor to actually live here.

I think it's fair to say that every President is acutely aware that we are just temporary residents. We're renters here. We're charged with the upkeep until our lease runs out. But we also leave a piece of ourselves in this place. And today, with the unveiling of the portraits next to me, President and Mrs. Bush will take their place alongside men and women who built this country and those who worked to perfect it.

It's been said that no one can ever truly understand what it's like being President until they sit behind that desk and feel the weight

and responsibility for the first time. And that is true. After 3½ years in office, and much more gray hair, I have a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by the Presidents who came before me, including my immediate predecessor, President Bush.

In this job, no decision that reaches your desk is easy. No choice you make is without costs. No matter how hard you try, you're not going to make everybody happy. I think that's something President Bush and I both learned pretty quickly. [*Laughter*]

And that's why, from time to time, those of us who have had the privilege to hold this office find ourselves turning to the only people on Earth who know the feeling. We may have our differences politically, but the Presidency transcends those differences. We all love this country. We all want America to succeed. We all believe that when it comes to moving this country forward, we have an obligation to pull together. And we all follow the humble, heroic example of our first President, George Washington, who knew that a true test of patriotism is the willingness to freely and graciously pass the reins of power on to somebody else.

That's certainly been true of President Bush. The months before I took the oath of office were a chaotic time. We knew our economy was in trouble, our fellow Americans were in pain, but we wouldn't know until later just how breathtaking the financial crisis had been. And still, over those 2½ months, in the midst of that crisis, President Bush, his Cabinet, his staff, many of you who are here today, went out of your ways—George, you went out of your way—to make sure that the transition to a new administration was as seamless as possible.

President Bush understood that rescuing our economy was not just a Democratic or a Republican issue, it was a American priority. I'll always be grateful for that.

The same is true for our national security. None of us will ever forget where we were on that terrible September day when our country was attacked. All of us will always remember the image of President Bush standing on that pile of rubble, bullhorn in hand, conveying extraordinary strength and resolve to the American people, but also representing the strength and resolve of the American people.

And last year, when we delivered justice to Usama bin Laden, I made it clear that our success was due to many people in many organizations working together over many years, across two administrations. That's why my first call, once American forces were safely out of harm's way, was to President Bush. Because protecting our country is neither the work of one person nor the task of one period of time. It's an ongoing obligation that we all share.

Finally, on a personal note, Michelle and I are grateful to the entire Bush family for their guidance and their example during our own transition. George, I will always remember the gathering you hosted for all the living former Presidents before I took office, your kind words of encouragement. Plus, you also left me a really good TV sports package. I was—*[laughter]*—I use it.

Laura, you reminded us that the most rewarding thing about living in this house isn't the title or the power, but the chance to shine a spotlight on the issues that matter most. And the fact that you and George raised two smart,

beautiful daughters—first, as girls visiting their grandparents and then as teenagers preparing to head out into the world—that obviously gives Michelle and I tremendous hope as we try to do the right thing by our own daughters in this slightly odd atmosphere that we've created.

Jenna and Barbara, we will never forget the advice you gave Sasha and Malia as they began their lives in Washington. They told them to surround themselves with loyal friends, never stop doing what they love, to slide down the banisters occasionally—*[laughter]*—to play sardines on the lawn, to meet new people and try new things, and to try to absorb everything and enjoy all of it. And I can tell you that Malia and Sasha took that advice to heart. It really meant a lot to them.

One of the greatest strengths of our democracy is our ability to peacefully and routinely go through transitions of power. It speaks to the fact that we've always had leaders who believe in America and everything it stands for above all else; leaders and their families who are willing to devote their lives to the country that they love.

This is what we'll think about every time we pass these portraits, just as millions of other visitors will do in the decades and, perhaps, even the centuries to come. I want to thank John Howard Sanden, the artist behind these beautiful works, for his efforts. And on behalf of the American people, I want to thank most sincerely President and Mrs. Bush for their extraordinary service to our country.

And now I'd like to invite them on stage to take part in the presentation.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:31 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Frederick J. Ryan, Jr., chairman, White House Historical Association; and former Presidents Jimmy Carter and William J. Clinton. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of former President George W. Bush, former First Lady Laura Bush, and First Lady Michelle Obama.