

Remarks by President Obama in Address to the Parliament of Canada

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PRESIDENT OBAMA: Thank you so much. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you, everybody. (Applause.) Thank you so much. Thank you. Please, everyone have a seat. Thank you. (Applause.) Thank you so much.

Good evening. Bonjour. Mr. Prime Minister, Mr. Speaker, members of the House, members of the Senate, distinguished guests, people of Canada -- thank you for this extraordinary welcome, which tempts me to just shut up and leave. (Laughter.) Because it can't get any better than this. (Laughter.) Obviously I'm grateful for the warm welcome. I'm extraordinarily grateful for the close working relationship and friendship with your outstanding Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, and his extraordinary wife, Sophie.

But I think it's fair to say that much of this greeting is simply a reflection of the extraordinary alliance and deep friendship between Canadians and Americans.

Justin, thank you for your very kind words, and for the new energy and hope that your leadership has brought to your nation as well as to the alliance. My time in office may be nearing an end, but I know that Canada -- and the world -- will benefit from your leadership for years to come. (Applause.)

So Canada was the very first country that I visited as President. It was in February. (Laughter.) It was colder. (Laughter.) I was younger. (Laughter.) Michelle now refers to my hair as the Great White North. (Laughter.) And on that visit, I strolled around the ByWard Market, tried a "beaver tail" -- (laughter) -- which is better than it sounds. (Laughter.) And I was struck then, as I am again today, by the warmth of the Canadians. I could not be more honored to be joining you in this historic hall -- this cathedral of

freedom. And we Americans can never say it enough -- we could not ask for a better friend or ally than Canada. (Applause.) We could not. It's true. It is true. And we do not take it for granted.

That does not mean we don't have our differences. As I understand it, one of the reasons the Queen chose this site for Parliament was that it was a safe distance from America's border. (Laughter.) And I admit, in the War of 1812, American troops did some damage to Toronto. I suspect that there were some people up here who didn't mind when the British returned the favor and burned down the White House. (Laughter.)

In more recent times, however, the only forces crossing our borders are the armies of tourists and businesspeople and families who are shopping and doing business and visiting loved ones. Our only battles take place inside the hockey rink. Even there, there's an uneasy peace that is maintained. As Americans, we, too, celebrate the life of Mr. Hockey himself, the late, great Gordie Howe. (Applause.) Just as Canadians can salute American teams for winning more Stanley Cups in the NHL. (Laughter.)

AUDIENCE: Ooooh --

PRESIDENT OBAMA: I told you I should have stopped after the applause. (Laughter.)

But in a world where too many borders are a source of conflict, our two countries are joined by the longest border of peace on Earth. (Applause.) And what makes our relationship so unique is not just proximity. It's our enduring commitment to a set of values -- a spirit, alluded to by Justin, that says no matter who we are, where we come from, what our last names are, what faith we practice, here we can make of our lives what we will.

It was the grit of pioneers and prospectors who pushed West across a forbidding frontier. The dreams of generations -- immigrants, refugees -- that we've welcomed to these shores. The hope of run-away slaves who went north on an underground railroad. "Deep in our history of struggle," said Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., "Canada was the north star... The freedom road links us together."

We're bound as well by the service of those who've defended us -- at Flanders Field, the beaches of Normandy, in the skies of the Balkans, and more recently, in the mountains of Afghanistan, and training bases in Iraq. Their sacrifice is reflected in the silent rows of Arlington and in the Peace Tower above us. Today we honor those who gave their lives for all of us. (Applause.)

We're linked together, as well, by the institutions that we've built to keep the peace: A United Nations to advance our collective aspirations. A NATO alliance to ensure our security. NORAD, where Americans and Canadians stand watch side by side -- and track Santa on Christmas Eve. (Laughter.)

We're linked by a vast web of commerce that carries goods from one end of this continent to another. And we're linked by the ties of friendship and family -- in my case, an outstanding brother-in-law in Burlington. (Applause.) Had to give Burlington a shout out. (Applause.) Our relationship is so remarkable precisely because it seems so

unremarkable -- which is why Americans often are surprised when our favorite American actor or singer turns out to be Canadian! (Applause.) The point is we see ourselves in each other, and our lives are richer for it.

As President, I've deepened the ties between our countries. And because of the progress we've made in recent years, I can stand before you and say that the enduring partnership between Canada and the United States is as strong as it has ever been, and we are more closely aligned than ever before. (Applause.)

And yet, we meet at a pivotal moment for our nations and for the globe. From this vibrant capital, we can look upon a world that has benefited enormously from the international order that we helped to build together' but we can see that same order increasingly strained by the accelerating forces of change. The world is by most every measure less violent than ever before; but it remains riven by old divisions and fresh hatreds. The world is more connected than ever before; but even as it spreads knowledge and the possibility of greater understanding between peoples, it also empowers terrorists who spread hatred and death -- most recently in Orlando and Istanbul.

The world is more prosperous than ever before, but alongside globalization and technological wonders we also see a rise in inequality and wage stagnation across the advanced economies, leaving too many workers and communities fearful of diminishing prospects, not just for themselves, but more importantly, for their children.

And in the face of such rising uncertainty, it is not enough to look at aggregate growth rates, or stock prices, or the pace of digital innovation. If the benefits of globalization accrue only to those at the very top, if our democracies seem incapable of assuring broad-based growth and opportunity for everyone, then people will push back, out of anger or out of fear. And politicians -- some sincere, and some entirely cynical -- will tap that anger and fear, harkening back to bygone days of order and predictability and national glory, arguing that we must rebuild walls and disengage from a chaotic world, or rid ourselves of the supposed ills brought on by immigrants -- all in order to regain control of our lives.

We saw some of these currents at work this past week in the United Kingdom's referendum to leave the European Union. Despite some of the initial reactions, I am confident that the process can be managed in a prudent, orderly way. I expect that our friends on both sides of the Channel will develop a workable plan for how to move forward. And I'm equally confident that the Transatlantic values that we all share as liberal, market-based democracies are deeper and stronger than any single event.

But while the circumstances of Brexit may be unique to the United Kingdom, the frustrations people felt are not. The short-term fallout of Brexit can be sensibly managed, but the long-term trends of inequality and dislocation and the resulting social division -- those can't be ignored. How we respond to the forces of globalization and technological change will determine the durability of an international order that ensures security and prosperity for future generations.

And fortunately, the partnership between the United States and Canada shows the path we need to travel. For our history and our work together speak to a common set of values to build on -- proven values, values that your Prime Minister spoke of in his introduction -- values of pluralism and tolerance, rule of law, openness; global engagement and commerce and cooperation, coupled with equal opportunity and an investment in our people at home. As Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau once said, "A country, after all, is not something you build as the pharaohs build the pyramids, and then leave standing there to defy eternity. A country is something that is built every day out of certain basic shared values." What is true of countries is true of the world. And that's what I want to talk about today -- how to strengthen our institutions to advance these commitments in a rapidly changing world.

Let me start with our shared economic vision. In all we do, our commitment to opportunity for all of our people has to be at the centerpiece of our work. We are so fortunate because both of our countries are so well-positioned to succeed in the 21st century. Our two nations know firsthand the awesome power of free markets and innovation. Canadians help run some of Silicon Valley's most innovative companies. Our students study at each other's world-class universities. We invest in research and development, and make decisions based on science and evidence. And it works. It's what's created these extraordinary economies of ours.

But if the financial crisis and recent recession taught us anything, it's that economies do better when everyone has a chance to succeed. For a long time, it was thought that countries had to choose between economic growth or economic inclusion. But it turns out that's a false choice. If a CEO makes more in a day than a typical employee makes in a year, that kind of inequality is not just bad for morale in the company, it turns out it's bad for the economy -- that worker is not a very good customer for business. (Applause.)

If a young man in Ohio can't pay his student loans, or a young woman in Ontario can't pay her bills, that has ramifications for our economy. It tamps down the possibilities of growth. So we need growth that is broad and that lifts everybody up -- including tax policies that do right by working families, and robust safety nets for those who fall on hard times. As John Kenneth Galbraith once said, "the common denominator of progress" is our people. It's not numbers, it's not abstractions, it's how are our people doing.

Of course, many who share this progressive, inclusive vision can be heard now arguing that investments in our people, protection for our workers, fair tax policies, these things are not enough. For them, globalization is inherently rigged towards the top one percent, and therefore, what's needed is an end to trade agreements and various international institutions and arrangements that integrate national economies.

And I understand that vision. I know why it's tempting. It seems as if we draw a line around our borders that it will give us more control, particularly when the benefits of trade and economic integration are sometimes hard to see or easy to take for granted, and very specific dislocations are obvious and real.

There's just one problem: Restricting trade or giving in to protectionism in this 21st century economy will not work. (Applause.) It will not work. Even if we wanted to, we can't seal ourselves off from the rest of the world. The day after Brexit, people looked around and said, oh! (Laughter.) How is this going to work? The drag that economic weakness in Europe and China and other countries is having on our own economies right now speaks to the degree to which we depend -- our economies depend, our jobs, our businesses depend -- on selling goods and services around the world.

Very few of our domestic industries can sever what is now truly a global supply chain. And so, for those of us who truly believe that our economies have to work for everybody, the answer is not to try and pull back from our interconnected world; it is rather to engage with the rest of the world, to shape the rules so they're good for our workers and good for our businesses.

And the experience between our two nations points the way. The United States and Canada have the largest bilateral trade and investment relationship in the world -- and we are stronger for it. (Applause.) It means a company in Quebec can create jobs in North Carolina. And a start-up in Toronto can attract investment from Texas. Now, the problem is that some economies in many of the fastest-growing regions of the world -- particularly the Asia Pacific region -- don't always abide by the same rules. They impose unfair tariffs; or they suppress workers' rights; or they maintain low environmental standards that make it hard for our businesses to compete fairly.

With the Trans-Pacific Partnership, we have the ability to not only open up these markets to U.S. and Canadian products and eliminate thousands of these unfair tariffs -- which, by the way, we need to do because they're already selling here under existing rules, but we're not selling as much as we should over there -- but it also affords us the opportunity to increase protections for workers and the environment, and promote human rights, including strong prohibitions against human trafficking and child labor. And that way our workers are competing on a level playing field, and our businesses are less prone to pursue a race to the bottom. And when combined with increased investments in our own people's education, and skills and training, and infrastructure and research and development and connectivity, then we can spur the kind of sustained growth that makes all of us better off. (Applause.) All of us.

The point is we need to look forward, not look backward. And more trade and more people-to-people ties can also help break down old divides. I thank Canada for its indispensable role in hosting our negotiations with the Cuban government, and supporting our efforts to set aside half a century of failed policies to begin a new chapter with the Cuban people. (Applause.) I know a lot of Canadians like going to Cuba -- (laughter) -- maybe because there haven't been Americans crowding the streets and the beaches. But that's changing. (Laughter.) And as more Americans engage with the Cuban people, it will mean more economic opportunity and more hope for ordinary Cubans.

We also agree, us Americans and Canadians, that wealthy countries like ours cannot reach our full potential while others remain mired in poverty. That, too, is not going to change in this interconnected world; that if there is poverty and disease and conflict in other parts of the world, it spills over, as much as we'd like to pretend that we can block it out.

So, with our commitment to new Sustainable Development Goals, we have the chance to end the outrage of extreme poverty. (Applause.) We can bring more electricity to Africa, so that students can study at night and businesses can stay open. We can banish the scourge of malaria and Zika. We can realize our goal of the first AIDS-free generation. (Applause.) We can do that. It's within our grasp. And we can help those who are working to replace corruption with transparent, accountable institutions that serve their people.

As leaders in global development, the United States and Canada understand that development is not charity -- it's an investment in our future prosperity. (Applause.) Because not only do such investments and policies help poor countries, they're going to create billions of customers for U.S. and Canadian products, and they'll make less likely the spread of deadly epidemics to our shores, and they'll stabilize parts of the world that threaten the security of our people.

In fact, both the United States and Canada believe our own security -- and not just prosperity -- is enhanced when we stand up for the rights of all nations and peoples to live in security and peace. (Applause.) and even as there are times when unilateral action is necessary to defend our people, we believe that in a world where wars between great powers are far less likely but transnational threats like terrorism know no boundaries, our security is best advanced when nations work together. We believe that disputes that do arise between nations should be, wherever possible, resolved peacefully, with diplomacy; that international organizations should be supported; that multilateralism is not a dirty word. (Applause.)

And certainly, we're more secure when we stand united against terrorist networks and ideologies that have reached to the very doorstep of this hall. We honor all those taken from us by violent extremists, including Canadians John Ridsdel and Robert Hall. (Applause.) With Canada's additional contributions, including training Iraqi forces, our coalition is on the offensive across Iraq, across Syria. And we will destroy the terrorist group ISIL. (Applause.) We will destroy them.

We'll continue helping local forces and sharing intelligence, from Afghanistan to the Philippines, so that we're pushing back comprehensively against terrorist networks. And in contrast to the hatred and the nihilism of terrorists, we'll work with partners around the world, including, particularly, Muslim communities, to offer a better vision and a path of development, and opportunity, and tolerance. (Applause.) Because they are, and must be, our partners in this effort. (Applause.)

Meanwhile, when nations violate international rules and norms -- such as Russia's aggression against Ukraine -- the United States and Canada stand united, along with our allies, in defense of our collective security. (Applause.) Doing so requires a range of tools, like economic sanctions, but it also requires that we keep our forces ready for 21st century missions, and invest in new capabilities. As your ally and as your friend, let me say that we'll be more secure when every NATO member, including Canada, contributes its full share to our common security. (Applause.) Because the Canadian armed forces are really good -- (applause) -- and if I can borrow a phrase, the world needs more Canada. NATO needs more Canada. (Applause.) We need you. We need you.

Just as we join together in our common defense, so must we work together diplomatically, particularly to avert war. Diplomacy results are rarely quick, but it turns out even the most intractable conflicts can be resolved. Here in our own hemisphere, just in the last few weeks, after half a century of war, Colombia is poised to achieve an historic peace. (Applause.) And the nations of North America will be an important partner to Colombia going forward, including working to remove landmines.

Around the world, Canadian and American diplomats working together can make a difference. Even in Syria, where the agony and the suffering of the Syrian people tears at our hearts, our two nations continue to be leaders in humanitarian aid to the Syrian people. And although a true resolution of this conflict so far has eluded us, we know that the only solution to this civil war is a political solution, so that the Syrian people can reclaim their country and live in peace. And Canadians and Americans are going to work as hard as we can to make that happen. (Applause.) I should add that here in the nation of Lester Pearson, we reaffirm our commitment to keep strengthening the peacekeeping that saves lives around the world.

There is one threat, however, that we cannot solve militarily, nor can we solve alone -- and that is the threat of climate change. Now, climate change is no longer an abstraction. It's not an issue we can put off for the future. It is happening now. It is happening here, in our own countries. The United States and Canada are both Arctic nations, and last year, when I became the first U.S. President to visit the Arctic, I could see the effects myself. Glaciers -- like Canada's Athabasca Glacier -- are melting at alarming rates. Tundra is burning. Permafrost is thawing. This is not a conspiracy. It's happening. Within a generation, Arctic sea ice may all but disappear in the summer.

And so skeptics and cynics can insist on denying what's right in front of our eyes. But the Alaska Natives that I met, whose ancestral villages are sliding into the sea -- they don't have that luxury. They know climate change is real. They know it is not a hoax. And from Bangladesh to the Pacific islands, rising seas are swallowing land and forcing people from their homes. Around the world, stronger storms and more intense droughts will create humanitarian crises and risk more conflict. This is not just a moral issue, not just an economic issue, it is also an urgent matter of our national security.

And for too long, we've heard that confronting climate change means destroying our own economies. But let me just say, carbon emissions in the United States are back to where they were two decades ago, even as we've grown our economy dramatically over the same

period. Alberta, the oil country of Canada, is working hard to reduce emissions while still promoting growth. (Applause.)

So if Canada can do it, and the United States can do it, the whole world can unleash economic growth and protect our planet. We can do this. (Applause.) We can do it. We can do this. We can help lead the world to meet this threat.

Already, together in Paris, we achieved the most ambitious agreement in history to fight climate change. Now let's bring it into force this year. (Applause.) With our agreement with Mexico that we announced today, let's generate half the electricity on this continent from clean energy sources within a decade. That's achievable. (Applause.) Let's partner in the Arctic to help give its people the opportunity they deserve, while conserving the only home they know. And building on the idea that began in Montreal three decades ago, let's finally phase down dangerous HFC greenhouse gases. This is the only planet we've got. And this may be the last shot we've got to save it. And America and Canada are going to need to lead the way. (Applause.) We're going to have to lead the way.

Just as we are joined in our commitment to protecting the planet, we are also joined in our commitment to the dignity of every human being. We believe in the right of all people to participate in society. We believe in the right of all people to be treated equally, to have an equal shot at success. That is in our DNA, the basic premise of our democracies.

I think we can all agree that our democracies are far from perfect. They can be messy, and they can be slow, and they can leave all sides of a debate unsatisfied. Justin is just getting started. (Laughter.) So in case you hadn't figured that out, that's where this gray hair comes from. (Laughter.) But more than any other system of government, democracy allows our most precious rights to find their fullest expression, enabling us, through the hard, painstaking work of citizenship, to continually make our countries better. To solve new challenges. To right past wrongs.

And, Prime Minister, what a powerful message of reconciliation it was -- here and around the world -- when your government pledged a new relationship with Canada's First Nations. (Applause.)

Democracy is not easy. It's hard. Living up to our ideals can be difficult even in the best of times. And it can be harder when the future seems uncertain, or when, in response to legitimate fears and frustrations, there are those who offer a politics of "us" versus "them," a politics that scapegoats others -- the immigrant, the refugee, someone who seems different than us. We have to call this mentality what it is -- a threat to the values that we profess, the values we seek to defend.

It's because we respect all people that the world looks to us as an example. The colors of the rainbow flag have flown on Parliament Hill. They have lit up the White House. That is a testament to our progress, but also the work that remains to ensure true equality for our fellow citizens who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. (Applause.)

Our Muslim friends and neighbors who run businesses, and serve in our governments and in our armed forces, and are friends with our children, play on our sports teams -- we've got to stand up against the slander and the hate leveled against those who look or worship differently. That's our obligation. That's who we are. That's what makes America special. That's what makes Canada special. (Applause.) Here. Here in Canada. (Applause.)

Here in Canada, a woman has already risen to the highest office in the land. In America, for the first time, a woman is the presumptive nominee of a major party and perhaps President. (Applause.) I have a bias on these issues -- (laughter) -- but our work won't be finished until all women in our country are truly equal -- paid equally, treated equally, given the same opportunities as men, when our girls have the same opportunities as our boys. (Applause.) That's who we need to be. (Applause.)

And let me say this -- because I don't feel particularly politically correct on this issue -- I don't believe that these are American values or Canadian values or Western values. I believe, and Justin believes, and I hope all of you believe, these are universal values. And we must be bold in their defense, at home and around the world. (Applause.) And not shy away from speaking up on behalf of these values of pluralism and tolerance and equality. (Applause.)

I fear sometimes that we are timid in defense of these values. That's why I will continue to stand up for those inalienable rights, here in our own hemisphere -- in places like Cuba and Venezuela -- but also in more distant lands. For the rights of citizens in civil society to speak their mind and work for change. For the right of journalists to report the truth. For the right of people of all faiths to practice their religion freely. Those things are hard, but they're right. They're not always convenient, but they're true.

In the end, it is this respect for the dignity of all people, especially the most vulnerable among us, that perhaps more than anything else binds our two countries together. Being Canadian, being American is not about what we look like or where our families came from. It is about our commitment to a common creed. And that's why, together, we must not waver in embracing our values, our best selves. And that includes our history as a nation of immigrants, and we must continue to welcome people from around the world. (Applause.)

The vibrancy of our economies are enhanced by the addition of new, striving immigrants. But this is not just a matter of economics. When refugees escape barrel bombs and torture, and migrants cross deserts and seas seeking a better life, we cannot simply look the other way. We certainly can't label as possible terrorists vulnerable people who are fleeing terrorists. (Applause.)

We can insist that the process is orderly. We can insist that our security is preserved. Borders mean something. But in moments like this, we are called upon to see ourselves in others, because we were all once strangers. If you weren't a stranger, your grandparents were strangers. Your great-grandparents were strangers. They didn't all have their papers ready. They fumbled with language faced discrimination, had cultural norms that didn't fit. At some point, somewhere, your family was an outsider. So the mothers, the fathers, the children we see today -- they're us. We can't forsake them.

So, as Americans and Canadians, we will continue to welcome refugees, and we can ensure that we're doing so in a way that maintains our security. We can and we will do both. (Applause.) We can and we will do both.

We're increasing our support to Central America, so that fewer families and children attempt the dangerous journey north. This fall at the United Nations, we'll host a global summit on refugees, because in the face of this crisis, more nations need to step up and meet our basic obligations to our fellow human beings. And it will be difficult, and budgets are tight, and there are legitimate issues and not everybody is going to be helped. But we can try. People of goodwill and compassion show us the way.

Greek islanders pulling families to shore. And Germans handing out sweets to migrants at railway stations. A synagogue in Virginia inviting Syrian refugees to dinner. And here, in Canada, the world has been inspired as Canadians across this country have opened up their hearts and their homes. And we've watched citizens knitting tuques to keep refugees warm in the winter. (Laughter.) And we've seen your Prime Minister welcome new arrivals at the airport, and extend the hand of friendship and say, "You're safe at home now."

And we see the refugees who feel that they have a special duty to give back, and seize the opportunities of a new life. Like the girl who fled Afghanistan by donkey and camel and jet plane, and who remembers being greeted in this country by helping hands and the sound of robins singing. And today, she serves in this chamber, and in the cabinet, because Canada is her home. (Applause.)

A country "is not something you build as the pharaohs built the pyramids...a country is something that is built every day out of certain basic shared values." How true that is. How blessed we are to have had people before us, day by day, brick by brick, build these extraordinary countries of ours. How fortunate, how privileged we are to have the opportunity to now, ourselves, build this world anew. What a blessing. And as we go forward together, on that freedom road, let's stay true to the values that make us who we are -- Canadians and Americans, allies and friends, now and forever.

Thank you very much. Merci beaucoup. (Applause.) Thank you.

END

6:52 P.M. EDT