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**Remarks of President Barack Obama
America's Leadership in the Ebola Fight
Washington, D.C.
February 11, 2015**

Thank you, everybody. Thank you, Rear Admiral Giberson¹, [GUY-bur-sun], not only for that introduction, but for your leadership and your service.

Last summer, as Ebola spread in West Africa², overwhelming public health systems and threatening to cross more borders³, I said that fighting this disease had to be more than a national security priority⁴, but an example of American leadership.⁵ After all, whenever and wherever disaster or disease strikes, the world looks to America to lead.⁶ And because of people like you, we have.

There was no small amount of skepticism about our chances.⁷ People were understandably afraid, and, let's be honest, some stoked those fears.⁸ But we believed that if we made policy based not on fear, but on sound science and sounder judgment, America could lead an effective global response while keeping the American people safe.⁹ We could turn the tide of the epidemic.

We believed this because of people like Rear Admiral Giberson.¹⁰ We believed this because of leaders like Dr. Raj Shah at USAID¹¹ and Dr. Tom Frieden at the CDC.¹² We believed it because of the men and women behind me and the many others here at home and overseas who respond to challenge not only with skill and professionalism, but courage and dedication. And because of your extraordinary work, we've made enormous progress in just a few months.¹³

So my main message today is to say thank you. Thank you to the troops and public health workers who left their loved ones to head into the heart of the Ebola epidemic in West Africa. Thank you to the health care professionals here at home who treated our returning heroes like Dr. Kent Brantly and Dr. Craig Spencer.¹⁴ Thank you to Dr. Anthony Fauci

¹ Email traffic, and: <http://www.hhs.gov/blog/2014/11/17/offering-help-healing-and-hope-liberia.html>

² Sarada ok'd

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⁶ Unga speech, we've said before

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⁸ Politifact ebola on a bus ; Christie

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¹¹ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/in-the-loop/wp/2014/12/17/usaid-head-raj-shah-to-tell-staff-hes-leaving-which-we-all-knew/>

¹² <http://www.cdc.gov/about/cdcdirector/>

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-31137036>

¹⁴ <http://www.npr.org/blogs/goatsandsoda/2014/12/15/370958095/dr-kent-brantly-the-lessons-hes-learned-from->

¹⁵, Dr. Nancy Sullivan¹⁶, and the incredible scientists at the NIH, who work long days and late nights to develop a vaccine.¹⁷ You represent what is best about America – and what is possible when America leads.

We're also here to mark a transition in our fight against this disease. Thanks to the hard work of our nearly 3,000 troops who deployed to West Africa¹⁸, logistics have been set up¹⁹, Ebola treatment units have been built²⁰, over 1,500 African health workers have been trained²¹, and volunteers from around the world gained the confidence to join the fight.²² As a result, more than 1,500 of our troops have already returned.²³ And today, I'm announcing that over the next 60 days, but for 100 who will remain to help support the ongoing response, the rest of our troops will come home.²⁴

Now, I want to be perfectly clear. While our troops are coming home, America's work is not done – far from it. Our mission is not complete. Today, we move into the next phase of the fight, winding down our military response while expanding our civilian response.²⁵ That starts here at home, where we're more prepared to protect Americans from infectious disease, but still have more work to do – for as long as Ebola simmers anywhere in the world, we might occasionally see Ebola fighting heroes return home with the disease. That's why we're screening and monitoring all arrivals from affected countries.²⁶ We've equipped more hospitals with new protective gear and protocols.²⁷

fighting-ebola <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/12/nyregion/craig-spencer-new-york-ebola-patient-bellevue.html>

¹⁵ <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2014/10/24/ebola-update-desk-dr-anthony-fauci>

¹⁶ <http://news.yahoo.com/twists-turns-eventually-lead-promising-ebola-vaccine-082020311.html>

<http://www.niaid.nih.gov/labsandresources/labs/aboutlabs/vrc/biodefensereseearchlaboratory/Pages/sullivan.aspx>

¹⁷ <http://www.nih.gov/news/health/feb2015/niaid-02.htm> <http://news.yahoo.com/twists-turns-eventually-lead-promising-ebola-vaccine-082020311.html>

¹⁸ Dod press release: At the height of the epidemic, there were 2,800 DoD personnel deployed to West Africa. Given the success of the U.S. response to the crisis, the majority of DoD personnel in West Africa will now return home. Today, around 1,500 of them are already back to their duty stations and nearly all will return by April 30. All have or will undergo established controlled monitoring procedures.

¹⁹ See dod press release

²⁰ <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/02/11/us-health-ebola-usa-idUSKBN0LF01S20150211>

²¹ FLAGGED

²² <http://www.npr.org/blogs/goatsandsoda/2014/10/14/356144079/ebola-volunteers-are-needed-but-signing-on-isnt-easy>

²³ Dod: Today, around 1,500 of them are already back to their duty stations and nearly all will return by April 30. All have or will undergo established controlled monitoring procedures.

²⁴ FLAGGED Today, around 1,500 of them are already back to their duty stations and nearly all will return by April 30. All have or will undergo established controlled monitoring procedures.

²⁵ Dod: To support the 10,000 civilian responders that remain on the ground in West Africa, the Department of Defense will leave behind important assets that can help health workers stem potential outbreaks in the future.

²⁶ Fact sheet: Required travelers from one of the four Ebola-affected countries to travel via one of five U.S. airports, where an enhanced screening system has been deployed to identify any potential Ebola cases;

²⁷ Fact sheet: Specifically, the progress we have achieved domestically in the past two months includes: Expanded the network of hospitals prepared to deal with Ebola patients, increasing our capacity from 8 hospital beds at just three facilities to 53 beds at 35 designated Treatment Centers nationwide

We've built partnerships with states and cities, thanks to public servants like Mayor Mike Rawlings and Judge Clay Jenkins²⁸ of Dallas. A few months ago, only 13 states had the capability to test for Ebola.²⁹ Today, we have more than 54 labs in 44 states.³⁰ Only three facilities in the country were qualified to treat an Ebola patient.³¹ Today, we have 51 Ebola treatment centers.³² We have successfully treated eight Ebola patients in the U.S.³³ And we're grateful to be joined by six of these brave survivors today, including Dr. Richard Sacra.³⁴ He received world-class care at Nebraska Medical Center³⁵ – and a plasma donation from Dr. Kent Brantly³⁶ – and then he returned to Liberia to treat non-Ebola patients who need doctors.³⁷

Meanwhile, in West Africa, America has led a massive global effort to combat this epidemic. We mobilized other countries to join us in making concrete, significant commitments to fight this disease³⁸, and to strengthen global health systems for the long term.³⁹ In addition to the work of our troops, our USAID DART teams have directed the response⁴⁰ and our CDC disease detectives have traced contacts.⁴¹ Our health care workers and scientists helped contain the outbreak at its source⁴² and our team is providing support to 10,000 civilian responders on the ground.⁴³

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²⁹ Fact sheet: Grown our Ebola testing capacity from 13 labs in 13 states as of August to 42 labs in 36 states

³⁰ Ron Klain: 54 labs in 44 states!! Hurray!

³¹ Fact sheet: Expanded the network of hospitals prepared to deal with Ebola patients, increasing our capacity from 8 hospital beds at just three facilities to 53 beds at 35 designated Treatment Centers nationwide

³² FLAGGED

³³ EMAIL KRISTEN

³⁴ <http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/10/15/ebola-survivor-richard-sacra-what-must-next/Ht3relF2R19s7583e5xGtN/story.html>

³⁵ <http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2014/10/15/ebola-survivor-richard-sacra-what-must-next/Ht3relF2R19s7583e5xGtN/story.html>

³⁶ <http://abcnews.go.com/Health/dr-kent-brantly-donate-blood-thomas-eric-duncan/story?id=26226388>

³⁷ FLAGGED Sacra said he does not expect to work in the Ebola treatment unit when he returns to Liberia. Instead, he will care for patients with general health problems, such as malaria or diabetes, and attempt to give doctors a bit of rest after working around the clock at the hospital. <http://www.bostonglobe.com/metro/2015/01/12/mass-doctor-richard-sacra-return-liberia-after-recovering-from-ebola/yZ47Bjm5gLqZrzbUZZAGxJ/story.html>

³⁸ Fact Sheet: Galvanizing international support for the response, which has resulted in more than \$2 billion in commitments since mid-September... Leading and Expanding an International Coalition

³⁹ See above  PW FACT SHEET Update on the Ebola

⁴⁰ Usaid fact sheet: Within weeks, we mounted the largest U.S. response to a global health crisis in history. Thousands of U.S. Government personnel started working across the region, including the USAID Disaster Assistance Response Team that President Obama called the “strategic and operational backbone of America’s response.” At the same time, we helped our partners recruit, train, and equip hundreds of frontline healthcare workers. We created a pipeline of critical supplies—from protective suits to generators—and set up data systems to report precise information on new cases. And we helped launch aggressive local information campaigns, educating vulnerable communities on how to prevent infection. ; <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/16/fact-sheet-us-response-ebola-epidemic-west-africa>

⁴¹ Fact sheet: Since August, CDC personnel have worked with officials of Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone to establish robust exit screening procedures. Based on this screening, travelers with fever or other symptoms that may be suggestive of Ebola are denied boarding and referred to appropriate medical care. A similar program was put in place by French doctors working in Mali, starting in November.

⁴² FLAGGED

⁴³ DOD: To support the 10,000 civilian responders that remain on the ground in West Africa, the Department of

That's what Brett Sedgewick did.⁴⁴ He went to Liberia⁴⁵ with Global Communities⁴⁶, an NGO that partnered with us to respond to Ebola. Brett managed safe-burial teams ⁴⁷made up of locals who traveled to far-flung corners of Liberia⁴⁸ to ensure that those who lost their lives to Ebola were carefully, safely, and respectfully buried so that they cannot pass the disease to anyone else.⁴⁹ When the crisis hit, Brett volunteered, saying, "If you need me, just say the word."⁵⁰

That's who we are. That's the big-hearted, optimistic, can-do spirit of the American people. That's our willingness to help those in need. They're the values shared by Navy Lieutenant Andrea McCoy and her team, who deployed more than seven tons of equipment and processed over 1,800 blood samples. They're the values that drive Commander Guillermo Pimental, who led a team of Naval microbiologists to set up mobile laboratories that can diagnose Ebola within four hours. As he said, "It has been an honor for us to use our skills to make a difference."

These values – American values – matter to the world. At the Monrovia Medical Unit in Liberia – built by American troops; staffed by Rear Admiral Giberson and his team from the U.S. Public Health Service Corps – a nurse's aide named Rachael Walker went in for treatment, and left Ebola-free. Listen to what Rachael's sister said about you. "We were worried at first," she said, "but when we found out [Rachael] was being transferred to the American Ebola treatment unit, we thanked God first and then we thanked America second for caring about us."

The Americans here today aren't just doctors and nurses, soldiers and scientists. You're what one Lieutenant from the U.S. Public Health Service Corps calls "hope multipliers." And your results have been remarkable. Last fall, we saw between 800 and 1000 new cases a week. Today, we're seeing between 100 and 150 cases a week – a drop of more than 80 percent. Liberia has seen the best progress, while Guinea and Sierra Leone have a longer way to go. That what our focus is – getting to zero. Because as long as there is even one case of Ebola out there, the risk still exists. Every case is an ember that, if not contained, could become a new fire. So we're shifting our focus from fighting the epidemic to extinguishing it.

I thank a bipartisan majority in Congress, including the members here today, for approving funding to power this next phase in our response. And I want to acknowledge Sen. Chris Coons who recently travelled to the region, and saw firsthand that we must continue the fight in Africa.

Defense will leave behind important assets that can help health workers stem potential outbreaks in the future. In addition, DoD will identify 100 personnel who will maintain a continued presence in the region working to strengthen the disease preparedness and surveillance capacity of the national governments.

⁴⁴ Brett recently returned from Liberia in November and has been an integral part of their Ebola response team that established the burial teams that are credited with helping turn around the epidemic in Liberia.

⁴⁵ http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/an-ebola-aid-worker-returns-to-dc-and-21-days-of-anxious-self-monitoring/2014/11/26/52b275ec-70dd-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html

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⁴⁷ http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/an-ebola-aid-worker-returns-to-dc--and-21-days-of-anxious-self-monitoring/2014/11/26/52b275ec-70dd-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html

⁴⁸ **FLAGGED** <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20141118/102740/HHRG-113-FA16-Wstate-SedgewickB-20141118.pdf>

⁴⁹ <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/FA/FA16/20141118/102740/HHRG-113-FA16-Wstate-SedgewickB-20141118.pdf>

⁵⁰ http://www.washingtonpost.com/local/an-ebola-aid-worker-returns-to-dc--and-21-days-of-anxious-self-monitoring/2014/11/26/52b275ec-70dd-11e4-8808-afaa1e3a33ef_story.html

So while our troops are coming home, plenty of American heroes remain on the ground, with even more on the way. Doctors and nurses are treating patients, CDC experts are tracking cases, NIH teams are testing vaccines and cures, USAID workers are in the field – and countless American volunteers are on the front lines. And while our government organized this effort – and I particularly thank General Dempsey, Secretaries Burwell, Johnson, Kerry and their teams – we’re not working alone. I just met with leading philanthropists who’ve already done so much, and have committed to helping generously for this next phase. Other nations have joined the fight. And we’ll keep working together – because our common security depends on all of us.

That’s why we launched the Global Health Security Agenda last year to bring more nations together to better prevent, detect and respond to future outbreaks before they become epidemics. As I’ve said before, in the 21st century, we cannot build moats around our countries, and we shouldn’t try. What we should do is make sure everybody has basic health systems – from hospitals to doctors to better transportation networks – that allow for early warning against outbreaks of disease. That’s not just out of charity. It’s in our self-interest.

So as we transition into a new phase in this fight, make no mistake – America is as committed as ever, and I am as committed as ever, to getting to zero. And I know we can.

I know this because of people like Dr. William Walters. Dr. Walters is the Director of Operational Medicine at the State Department. Last summer, he was called to help move Dr. Kent Brantly back to the United States for treatment. Dr. Walters says the first thing he did was to Google Dr. Brantly – and the first picture he saw was of Kent and his family.

Now, the decision to move Kent back to the U.S. was controversial. Some were worried about bringing the disease to our shores. But folks like Dr. Walters knew we needed to make decisions based not on fear, but on science. And he knew that we needed to take care of our heroes who had sacrificed so much to save the lives of others. As Dr. Walters said, “We do the work we do to impact something bigger than ourselves.”

We do the work we do to impact something bigger than ourselves.

That’s what American leadership is all about. Give us a big challenge, tell us that it’s too hard to solve – and we will come together as a nation and prove you wrong. Whether it’s recession, or war, or terrorism, America has never succumbed to fear – instead, we master the moment with bravery and courage, selflessness and sacrifice, and a relentless, unbending, audacious hope.

Thank you – all of you – for proving that again. God bless you, and God bless the United States of America.