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Barack Obama

MLB Champion Chicago Cubs White House Visit Address

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They said this day would never come.^{1,2}

Here is something none of my predecessors ever got a chance to say: Welcome to the White House the World Series Champion Chicago Cubs!

Now, I know you guys would prefer to stand the whole time, but sit down.

I will say to the Cubs: It took you long enough. I mean, I've only got four days left. You're just making it under the wire.

Now, listen, I -- I made a lot of promises in 2008. We've managed to fulfill a large number of them, but even I was not crazy enough to suggest that during these eight years we would see the Cubs win the World Series. But I did say that there's never been anything false about hope. Hope. The audacity of hope.



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Audience Member: Yes, we can!

President Obama: Yes, we can.

Now, listen, for those of you from Chicago who have known me a long time, it is no secret that there's a certain South Side team that, you know, has...my loyalty. For me, the drought hasn't been as long. We had the '85 Bears; we had the the Bulls' run in the '90s. I've hosted the Blackhawks a number of times. The White Sox did win just 11 years ago with Ozzie and Konerko and Buerhle. So -- So I...can't claim that I have the same, just visceral joy of some in this White House.

But FLOTUS is a lifelong Cubs fan. And I will tell you, she had -- she had to go to another event, but in eight years that I've been here -- I told the team this -- in the eight years that I've been here, we've hosted at least 50 teams -- football, basketball, baseball, soccer, you name it. Michelle has never come to a single event celebrating a champion until today. And she came and shook hands and met with every one of these members of the Cubs organization, and told a story about what it meant for her to be able to see them win; because she remembers coming home from school and her dad would be watching a Cubs game, and the bond and the family, the -- the meaning that the Cubs had for her in terms of connecting with her father, and why it meant so much to her. And I -- I almost choked up listening to it. And it spoke, I think, to how people feel about this organization, and -- and that it's been passed on generation after generation. And -- And it's...more than sports.

And that is not just true for FLOTUS. My longest-serving aide, Anita [[Decker Breckenridge](#)], is a Cubs fan. When they -- When they -- "Fan"...is not enough -- When they won that -- they next day she said, "This is the best day of my life." And I said, "What about me winning the presidency?" "What about your wedding day?" She's like, "No, this is the best."

My chief speechwriter, Cody Keenan, Cuba fan. In fact, there were a lot of sick days during the playoffs.

One of my staff members was caught being interviewed at a bar outside of Wrigley, and -- and we're watching him being interviewed. You remember, Luke? [ph] And he's looking kind of sheepish about it. It's like, why aren't you in the office?



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But look, the truth is, there was a reason not just that people felt good about the Cubs winning. There was something about this particular Cubs team winning that people felt good about. For example, David Ross and I have something in common: We've both been on a "year-long retirement party." But unlike Grandpa, my team has not yet bought me a scooter with a motorized golf caddy. But there are four days left -- maybe I'll get that.

The last time the Cubs won the World Series, Teddy Roosevelt was President. Albert Einstein - - or was it Thomas Edison? -- was still alive. The first Cubs radio broadcast wouldn't be for almost two decades. We've been through World Wars, Cold War, a Depression, a space race, all manner of social and technological change. But during that time, those decades were also marked by Phil Cavarretta and Ernie Banks; Billy Williams, who's here today; Ron Santo, Ferg, Ryne Sandberg, Dawson, Maddux, Grace.

Those decades were punctuated by Lee Elia's rants and Harry Caray's exuberance;

-- "Hey, Hey,"

-- And "Holy Cow!"

And capped off by "Go Cubs Go."

So the first thing that made this championship so special for so many is, is that the Cubs know what it's like to be loyal, and to persevere, and to hope, and to suffer, and then keep on hoping. And -- And it's a -- it's a generational thing. That's what you heard Michelle describing. People all across the city remember the first time a parent took them to Wrigley, where memories of climbing into their dad's lap to watch games on WGN -- and that's part of the reason, by the way, why Michelle had invited -- made sure that José Cardenal was here, because that was her favorite player. And she was describing -- back then he had a big afro, and she was describing how she used to wear her hat over her afro the same way José did.

You could see all that love this season in the fans who traveled to their dads' gravesites to listen to games on the radio; who wore their moms' old jerseys to games; who covered the



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brick walls of Wrigley with love notes in chalk to departed fans whose lifelong faith was finally fulfilled.

None of this, of course, would have happened without the extraordinary contributions of the Ricketts family. Tom met his wife, Cece, in the bleachers of Wrigley about 30 years ago -- which is about 30 years longer than most relationships that begin there last. Our...dear friend Laura Ricketts met her wife, Brooke, in the ballpark, as well.

You know, brothers and sisters -- they -- they turned this team around by hiring what has to be one of the greatest, if not -- I mean, he's still pretty young, so we'll see how long he keeps on going -- the greatest general managers of all time, Theo Epstein, and along with -- and along with Jed Hoyer and Jason McLeod. They -- They did just an unbelievable job. Theo, as you know is -- his job is to quench droughts -- 86 years in Boston; 108 in Chicago. He takes the reins of an organization that's wandering in the wilderness; he delivers them to the Promised Land. I've talked to him about being DNC chair. But he decided wisely to stick to baseball.

That brings me to the other thing that was so special about this championship -- and that's just the -- they guys behind me, the team. They steamrolled the majors this year with a 103-win record. All you had to know about this team was encapsulated in that one moment in Game 5, down three games to one, do or die, in front of the home fans when David Ross and Jon Lester turned to each other and said, "I love you, man." And he said, "I love you, too." It was sort of like a Obama-Biden moment.

And then you've got the manager, Joe Maddon, who, let's face it -- let's face it, there are not a lot of coaches or managers who are as cool as this guy. Look how he looks right now. That's cool. That's cool. You know, he used costume parties and his "Shaggin' Wagon." So he's got -- I'm just saying -- he's got a lot of -- lot of tricks to -- to motivate. But he's also a master of tactics, and makes the right move at the right time: when to pinch hit, when to pinch run, when to make it rain in Game 7 of the World Series. It was masterful. So he set the tone, but also some of the -- the amazing players here set the tone.

My fellow "44" -- Anthony Rizzo, who's the heart of this team. Five years ago, he was a part of the squad that lost 101 games. He stuck at it, led the National League in All-Star votes this year.



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His business partner in the "Bryzzo Souvenir Company," which delivers baseballs to fans in all parts of the bleachers -- Kris Bryant. This guy -- This guy had a good year. You know, you go from Rookie of the Year to being the MVP. You win the World Series. And then, like me, he marries up and comes to the White House. And he did all this just in 10 days -- when it took me a long time. So, congratulations to the newlyweds, Jessica and Kris Bryant.

Then you got these young guys like Baez and Russell. Baez turning tagging into an art form.

Russell becoming the youngest player to hit a World Series Grand Slam since Mickey Mantle.

And you -- you mix these amazing young talents with somebody like David Ross who, for example, helped Anthony out of his "glass case of emotions" in Game 7. But think about what Rossy did in his final season: caught a no-hitter, surpassed 100 home runs for his career, including one in his last game ever. If there was ever a way to go out, this was it.

And then you got Ben Zobrist, who didn't get to come to the White House last year after winning it all with the Royals, but then hits .357 in the World Series, go-ahead RBI in the 10th inning of the Game 7, World Series MVP. I think he's earned his way here; and is apparently a good guy, because I asked his wife -- she was in line before he was -- I said, "Has he gotten a big head since he got the whole MVP thing?" "No, he's so sweet. He's so humble." You -- You owe her dinner tonight.

Extraordinary pitching staff, including Kyle Hendricks, the first Cub to lead the majors in ERA since 1938. Kyle, in turn, was the only pitcher this year with a better ERA than Jon Lester, who racked up 19 wins. Good job. You got Jake Arrieta, 2015 Cy Young [Award] winner, stretched a 20-game win streak featuring two no-hitters across the past two seasons, then hit a home run in the NLDS, and won two games in the World Series. So, apparently Pilates works. Michelle says it does.

So -- And then -- And then finally, the -- the game itself and the Series itself, come back from a 3-1 deficit against a great Cleveland Indians team forced what is widely considered the greatest Game 7 of all time. Dexter Fowler becomes the first player to hit a leadoff home run in Game 7.



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Javy Baez hits another leadoff the 5th. David Ross becomes the older player -- oldest player to knock one out in a Game 7, as well. Kyle Schwarber, who's been hurt and hobbled, then suddenly he comes in and gets seven hits in the Series -- three in Game 7 alone.

And then you've got the 10th inning. You've got the rain. God finally feeling mercy on Cubs fans. An entire game, an entire season, an entire century of hope and heartbreak all coming down to a one-inning sprint. And then Zobrist knocked in one. Montero knocked in another. Carl Edwards, Jr., Mike Montgomery teamed up to shut the Indians down.

And then, at 12:47 a.m. Eastern Time, Bryant -- looks like he's going to slip; everybody is getting a little stressed -- tosses a grounder to Rizzo; Rizzo gets the ball, slips it in his back pocket, which shows excellent situational awareness. And -- And suddenly everything is changed. No more black cats, billy goats, ghosts, flubbed grounders. The Chicago Cubs are -- are the champs. And on...ESPN, you've got Van Pelt saying, "one of the all-time great nights." You've got Tim Kurkjian calling it "the "greatest night [in] baseball" in the history of the game. Two days later, millions of people, the largest gathering of Americans that I know of in Chicago, and for a moment, our hometown becomes the very definition of joy. So in Chicago, I think it's fair to say you guys will be popular for a while.

But, in addition, they're also doing a lot of good work. Anthony Rizzo and Jon Lester raised money to help others beat cancer like they did. Under the -- Under the Rickett[s] Family's leadership, last year alone Cubs Charities supported charitable grants and donations of nearly 4 million dollars that reached nearly 120,000 children and young adults across Chicagoland. Under their "Let's Give" initiative, Cubs staff, coaches, players, and spouses donated more than 1500 hours of service last year to the community. And after their visit here today, they will head to Walter Reed to visit with some of our brave wounded warriors.

So...just to wrap up, you know today is -- today is, I think, our last official event -- isn't it? -- at the White House, under my presidency. And it also happens to be a day that we celebrate one of the great Americans of all time, Martin Luther King, Jr. And later, as soon as we're done here, Michelle and I are going to go over and do a service project, which is what we do every year to honor Dr. King.



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And it is worth remembering -- because sometimes people wonder, "Well why are you spending time on sports; there's other stuff going on?" -- that throughout our history, sports has had this power to bring us together, even when the country is divided. Sports has changed attitudes and culture in ways that seem subtle but that ultimately made us think differently about ourselves and who we were. It -- It is a game and it is celebration, but there's a direct line between Jackie Robinson and me standing here. There is a direct line between people loving Ernie Banks, and then the city being able to come together and work together in one spirit.

And I was in my hometown of Chicago on Tuesday, for my farewell address, and I said, sometimes it's not enough just to change laws, you got to change hearts. And -- And sports has a way, sometimes, of changing hearts in a way that politics or business doesn't. And, you know, sometimes it's just a matter of us being able to escape and relax from the -- the difficulties of our days. But sometimes it also speaks to something better in us. And when you see this group of folks of different shades and different backgrounds, and coming from different communities and neighborhoods all across the country, and then playing as one team and playing the right way, and celebrating each other and being joyous in that, that tells us a little something about what America is and what America can be.

So it is entirely appropriate that we celebrate the Cubs today, here in this White House, on Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday because it helps direct us in terms of what this country has been and what it can be in the future.

With that, one more time, let's congratulate the 2016 World Championship -- Chicago Cubs!

¹ The Chicago Cubs won the 2016 MLB World Series, 108 years after winning their last. It was the longest championship drought -- by some 40 years -- in MLB history.

² President Obama delivered the very same line -- also at the out start -- in a memorable address following his historic election victory in the 2008 Democratic Iowa Caucus.