

Administration of Barack Obama, 2016

Remarks at the Thanksgiving Turkey Presentation Ceremony

November 23, 2016

The President. Hey! Thank you so much, everybody. Please have a seat, have a seat.

For generations, Presidents have faithfully executed two great American traditions: issuing a proclamation that sets aside a Thursday in November for us to express gratitude, and granting pardons that reflect our beliefs in second chances. And this week, we do both. [*Laughter*]

Of course, Thanksgiving is a family holiday as much as a national one. So, for the past 7 years, I've established another tradition: embarrassing my daughters with a "corny-copia" of dad jokes about turkeys. [*Laughter*] This year, they had a scheduling conflict. [*Laughter*] Actually, they just couldn't take my jokes anymore. [*Laughter*] They were "fed" up.

Audience members. Ooh! Hey!

The President. Fortunately, I have by my side here today two of my nephews, Austin and Aaron Robinson, who, unlike Malia and Sasha, have not yet been turned cynical by Washington. [*Laughter*] They still believe in bad puns. They still appreciate the grandeur of this occasion. They still have hope. [*Laughter*]

Malia and Sasha, by the way, are thankful that this is my final Presidential turkey pardon. What I haven't told them yet is that we are going to do this every year from now on. [*Laughter*] No cameras. Just us. Every year. No way I'm cutting this habit cold turkey. [*Laughter*]

Good one, yes? That was pretty funny. Yes? [*Laughter*]

Thanksgiving is a chance—[*laughter*—to gather with loved ones, reflect on our many blessings, and after a long campaign season, finally turn our attention from polls to poultry. [*Laughter*] This year, we're honored to be joined by two of the lucky ones, who were raised by the Domino family in Iowa: Tater and Tot.

Now, Tater is here in a backup role, just in case Tot can't fulfill his duties. So he's sort of like the Vice Turkey. [*Laughter*] We're working on getting him a pair of aviator glasses. [*Laughter*]

And it is my great privilege—well, it's my privilege; actually, let's just say it's my job—[*laughter*—to grant them clemency this afternoon. As I do, I want to take a moment to recognize the brave turkeys who weren't so lucky, who didn't get to ride the gravy train to freedom—[*laughter*—who met their faith—fate with courage and sacrifice and proved that they weren't chicken. [*Laughter*]

[*At this point, a baby cried.*]

The President. Oh, it's not that bad now. Come on. [*Laughter*]

Of course, we have a lot to be thankful for this Thanksgiving: 6 straight years of job creation, the longest streak ever; low unemployment. Wages are rising again. Inequality is narrowing. The housing market is healing. The stock market has nearly tripled. Our high school graduation rate is at an alltime high. And our uninsured rate is at an alltime low, thanks to the 20 million more Americans, including millions of children, who finally know the security of health insurance. Proud families—[*applause*—that's worth gobbling about. [*Laughter*]

Proud families across the country are finally complete now that marriage equality is the law of the land. And there are many families of servicemembers who had empty chairs at the table in recent years, but who on this Thanksgiving can celebrate with our brave troops and veterans who we've welcomed home.

Thanksgiving is also a reminder of the source of our national strength: that out of many, we are one; that we're bound not by any one race or religion, but rather by an adherence to a common creed, that all of us are created equal. And while accepting our differences and building a diverse society has never been easy, it has never been more important. We are a people that look out for one another and get each other's backs. We keep moving forward, defined by values and ideals that have been a light to all humanity.

We have to see ourselves in each other, because we've all got families we love, and we all have hopes for their better future. And we lose sight of that sometimes, and Thanksgiving is a good time for us to remember that. We have a lot more in common than divides us.

The holidays are also a time when it's even more important to reach out to those who need a helping hand. I believe we're judged by how we care for the poor and the vulnerable, the sick and the elderly, the immigrant, the refugee, everybody who's trying to get a second chance. I believe that in order to truly live up to those ideals, we have to continually fight discrimination in all its forms and always show the world that America is a generous and giving country.

We should also make sure everyone has something to eat on Thanksgiving—of course, except the turkeys, because they're already stuffed. *[Laughter]* So, later today the——

Audience members. Ooh!

The President. *[Laughter]* So, later today the Obama family will participate in our traditional Thanksgiving service project. And when somebody at your table tells you that you've been hogging all the side dishes and you can't have any more, I hope that you respond with a creed that sums up the spirit of a hungry people: Yes, we can. *[Laughter]* That was good. *[Laughter]* You don't think that's funny? Look, I know there are some bad ones in here, but this is the last time I'm doing this, so we're not leaving any room for leftovers. *[Laughter]*

Let me just say—how am I doing? Good?

Austin Robinson. Good.

The President. Thumbs up?

Let me just say one last thing before I spare these turkeys' lives. On this Thanksgiving, I want to express my sincere gratitude to the American people for the trust that you've placed in me over these last 8 years and the incredible kindness that you've shown my family. On behalf of Michelle and my mother-in-law and our girls, we want to thank you so very, very much.

And now, from the Rose Garden, Tater and Tot will go to their new home at Virginia Tech, which is admittedly a bit Hokie. *[Laughter]* They'll get to live out their natural lives at a new facility called Gobblers Rest, where students and veterinarians will care for them. And so let's get on with the pardoning, because it's Wednesday afternoon, and everyone knows that Thanksgiving traffic can put people in a "fowl" mood.

Audience members. Ooh! *[Laughter]*

The President. Happy Thanksgiving, everybody. Let's go pardon these turkeys. Come on, guys! Come on! Come on!

[At this point, the President pardoned the turkeys accompanied by his nephews Austin and Aaron L. Robinson.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:42 p.m. in the Rose Garden at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Storm Lake, IA, turkey farmers Chris and Nicole Domino. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Shields Robinson. He also referred to Proclamation 9546.

Categories: Addresses and Remarks : Thanksgiving turkey presentation ceremony.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Domino, Chris; Domino, Nicole; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Robinson, Aaron L.; Robinson, Austin; Robinson, Marian Shields.

Subjects: Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Deployment; Civil rights : Same-sex marriage; Economy, national : Household income and wages; Economy, national : Improvement; Education : High school graduation rate; Health and medical care : Insurance coverage and access to providers; Holidays and special observances : Thanksgiving.

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