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## Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree

*December 1, 2016*

Hello, everybody. Happy holidays to all of you. Eva Longoria, thank you for the wonderful hosting. Kelly Clarkson, we love. To everybody who is here tonight and everybody watching at home, it is now officially the time to light this tree. [*Applause*] Are you guys ready to count down? We're going to start from five. You ready? You sure? Ok, let's go. Five, four, three, two, one! [*Applause*] Hey! Merry Christmas, everybody!

[*At this point, the President exited the stage. He later continued his remarks as follows*.]

Merry Christmas, everybody! Well, thank you, Dylan, for that introduction and for all that you do for our parks down in Texas. I also want to thank Reverend Haggins for her beautiful invocation. And as we continue to celebrate the centennial of our national parks, I want to recognize our tremendous Secretary of the Interior, Sally Jewell; our National Park Service Director, Jonathan Jarvis; and all the rangers and staff from the Park Service and the National Park Foundation. Here's to another 100 years.

Let's give it up for Eva Longoria and this star-studded group we have here performing tonight: gold medalist Simone Manuel, Kelly Clarkson, Yolanda Adams, Garth Brooks and Trisha Yearwood, Chance the Rapper, the Lumineers, Marc Anthony, James and Kim Taylor. It's like a Christmas edition of Lollapalooza. [*Laughter*]

And this is just another example of why the holidays here at the White House are so special. Last week, I pardoned a turkey. [*Laughter*] Tonight we're lighting the National Christmas Tree. This one is easier because a tree does not move. It does not gobble. [*Laughter*] You just push a button, and it's electrified, which is exactly what you don't want to have happen at a turkey pardon. [*Laughter*] I thought that was funny, Michelle. [*Laughter*] Thankfully, both events have gone off without a hitch.

Along with celebrations like these, the holidays also offer us a time for reflection and perspective. And over these next few weeks, as we celebrate the birth of our Savior, as we retell the story of weary travelers, a star, shepherds, Magi, I hope that we also focus ourselves on the message that this child brought to this Earth some 2,000 years ago, a message that says we have to be our brother's keepers, our sister's keepers; that we have to reach out to each other, to forgive each other; to let the light of our good deeds shine for all; to care for the sick and the hungry and the downtrodden; and of course, to love one another, even our enemies, and treat one another the way we would want to be treated ourselves.

It's a message that grounds not just my family's Christian faith, but that of Jewish Americans, Muslim Americans, nonbelievers, Americans of all backgrounds. It's a message of unity and a message of decency and a message of hope that never goes out of style. And it's one that we all need very much today.

After 8 years as your President, I still believe that there's so much more that unites us than divides us. I've seen it in parents from every corner of this country just trying to give their kids a better shot. I've seen it in communities that come together and find common ground even in times of trial and times of tragedy. We see it in immigrants and refugees striving for that most American of ideals: to better ourselves and our families. We see it in our troops who serve far from home during this holiday season, these outstanding men and women who go into harm's

way to protect the Nation that we love and the freedoms that we hold dear: the freedom to vote and speak out and practice our faiths as we choose, the freedom to chart our own course as citizens and as a nation.

That is the America that I've seen as we've come back from the depths of an economic crisis to an economy on the move, as we've recovered from wars and natural tragedies. What I've seen is a big-hearted and hopeful and resilient people who look out for each other and who have each other's backs and who find strength in our differences and who keep moving forward knowing that we're all in this together.

Those are our values. That is who we are. That's who we will always be. And this is the 94th time that Americans have gathered to light our national tree. It's the eighth and final time for our family. Before we leave tonight, I just want to express what an incredible honor it has been to serve this Nation and to feel its warmth and to feel its generosity and how our family has been awed by America's goodness. And most of all, it has been so special to share these 8 years with all of you.

So on behalf of Michelle and Malia, Sasha, Grandma—[*laughter*]—Bo, and Sunny, Merry Christmas, everybody. Happy holidays. May God bless you all, and may God bless these United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:41 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to actor Eva J. Longoria; musicians Kelly B. Clarkson, Yolanda Y. Adams, Garth Brooks, Trisha Yearwood, Chancelor J. "Chance the Rapper" Bennett, Marc Anthony, and James Taylor and his wife Kim; Dylan Carrejo, AmeriCorps alumnus, Texas Conservation Corps; Debra L. Haggins, university chaplain and pastor, Hampton University; and Simone Manuel, swimmer, 2016 U.S. Olympic Team. He also referred to his mother-in-law Marian Shields Robinson.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : National Christmas Tree, lighting ceremony.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Adams, Yolanda Y.; Anthony, Mark; Bennett, Chancelor J. "Chance the Rapper"; Brooks, Garth; Carrejo, Dylan; Clarkson, Kelly B.; Haggins, Debra L.; Jarvis, Jonathan B.; Jewell, Sarah M.R. "Sally"; Longoria, Eva J.; Manuel, Simone; Obama, Malia; Obama, Michelle; Obama, Natasha "Sasha"; Robinson, Marian Shields; Taylor, Caroline Smedvig "Kim"; Taylor, James V.; Yearwood, Trisha.

*Subjects:* Armed Forces, U.S. : Servicemembers :: Service and dedication; Holidays and special observances : Christmas; Interior, Department of the : Park Service, National; Interior, Department of the : Secretary.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD201600809.