

Statement on Senator Mel Martinez's Decision Not to Seek Reelection December 2, 2008

Throughout his distinguished career, Senator Mel Martinez has been a wonderful public servant. Mel's life story is a testament to the power of the American Dream. Since immigrating to the United States from Cuba at the age of 15 as a part of Operation Pedro Pan, he has taken on big challenges and built a record of achievement.

By becoming our country's first Cuban American Cabinet member as Secretary of Housing and Urban Development and the first Cuban American United States Sen-

ator, he has been a source of inspiration to people all across our country. As general chairman of the Republican National Committee, he worked to strengthen our party and expand outreach to new audiences. In addition, he has been a passionate voice for freedom in his native country.

Laura and I thank Mel for his leadership and friendship over the past 8 years, and we wish him and Kitty the best as he finishes his career in the Senate and afterward.

Remarks on Lighting the National Christmas Tree December 4, 2008

Thank you. Mr. Secretary, thank you for the introduction, and thank you for the warm welcome. Laura and I are pleased to welcome all of you here for one of Washington's great traditions, the lighting of the National Christmas Tree.

Santa, thank you for finally showing up. [Laughter] I know you've come a long way. After all, you do live in the North Pole. You may have heard that Laura and I are going to have plenty of time next year. [Laughter] So we look forward to returning the favor. The problem is we're going to be short on an airplane. [Laughter] Have you got an extra sleigh? [Laughter]

I welcome the members of my Cabinet, the administration, and their families; Members of Congress and their families; Vin Cipolla; Mary Bomar, the Director of the National Park Service; Peggy O'Dell, Regional Director, National Capital Region of the National Park Service. All the National Park Service employees, we thank you for your dedication and work.

Laura and I are thrilled to be here with our dear friend, Reverend Luis Leon. All the entertainers, thank you for being here. You were fabulous tonight. We appreciate your performance. We especially welcome the folks from Enterprise, Alabama. And we thank the school choir for showing the determination and grit of some really fine people.

We want to thank all the volunteers who designed and created the ornaments for our State trees.

Today we celebrate the 85th anniversary of the National Christmas Tree lighting. In times of calm and in times of challenge, Americans have gathered for this ceremony. The simple story we remember during the season speaks to every generation. It is the story of a humble birth in a quiet town, and the story of one life that changed millions more. For two millennia, the story of Christmas has brought joy to families, comfort to communities, and hope to hearts around the world.

During Christmas we celebrate the blessings of the season and the blessings that surround us every day. And the greatest of these blessings is freedom, the Almighty's gift to every man, woman, and child on the face of the Earth.

And today we give thanks to the brave men and women who protect the American people by defending freedom around the world. Over the past 8 years, my greatest honor as President has been serving as Commander in Chief of the finest military ever known.

Our men and women in uniform have stepped forward to defend our Nation during a time of war. They serve with courage and with honor, and they've made incredible sacrifices. Many of them will spend this Christmas stationed in distant lands, far from the families they love. Yet they're never far from our thoughts, and they are always in our prayers. America honors their service, and we are grateful to the sacrifice of the families who stand by their side.

Some of those families are with us tonight, and Laura and I are pleased to be joined by Kayleigh Kepler and Lindsey Van Horn. Lindsey's dad is in Baghdad. Kayleigh's dad will deploy to Iraq next year. Kayleigh and Lindsey, America is safer because of your dads, and moms and dads across America, who have stepped forward to defend our country.

And now I'm going to ask Kayleigh and Lindsey to get up here with Laura—to please come up with Laura—[laughter]—and help us light this beautiful tree.

Everybody join: five, four, three, two, one!

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:55 p.m. on the Ellipse at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne, who introduced the President; SFC Steve Cramer, USA, U.S. Army Chorus, in his role as Santa Claus; Vin Cipolla, president and chief executive officer, National Park Foundation; and Luis Leon, rector, St. John's Church.

Remarks on Signing the National Pearl Harbor Remembrance Day Proclamation and the Proclamation To Establish the World War II Valor in the Pacific National Monument December 5, 2008

The President. Thank you all for coming. I am going to sign two documents: one a Pearl Harbor Day proclamation and the other creating the World War II Valor in Pacific National Monument. The national monument will include nine sites: five in Hawaii, three in Alaska, and one in California at the Tule Lake Segregation Center, where Japanese Americans were detained during World War II.

The purpose of the monument is to remind generations of Americans of the sacrifices that Americans made to protect our country. But there's a broader purpose as well, and that is to remind generations of

Americans about the transformative effect of freedom.

One of the great stories of—during World War II was that people fought bitterly to defend our country and way of life and then worked to help our enemies develop democracies according to their own cultures and their own history. And today I am so pleased to report that Japan is a strong ally of the United States of America, an ally in defending our liberties, and an ally in spreading liberty as the great ideological alternative to an enemy that still wants to do us harm.