

Statement on Digital Television Conversion Delay Legislation *February 11, 2009*

During these challenging economic times, the needs of American consumers are a top priority of my administration. This law, which was crafted in a bipartisan way and passed overwhelmingly in the House and Senate, ensures that our citizens will have more time to prepare for the conversion. Millions of Americans, including those in our most vulnerable communities, would have been left in the dark if the conversion had gone on as planned, and this solution is an important step forward as we work to

get the Nation ready for digital TV. My administration will continue to work with leaders in Congress, broadcasters, consumer groups, and the telecommunications industry to improve the information and assistance available to our citizens in advance of June 12.

NOTE: The statement referred to S. 352, approved February 11, which was assigned Public Law No. 111-4.

Remarks at the Reopening of Ford's Theatre *February 11, 2009*

Thank you. Please, everybody have a seat. I will be brief, though, I promise.

What a spectacular evening. Michelle and I are so pleased to be here to rededicate this hallowed space. We know that Ford's Theatre will remain a place where Lincoln's legacy thrives, where his love of the humanities and belief in the power of education have a home, and where his generosity of spirit are reflected in all the work that takes place.

This has been an extraordinarily fitting tribute to Abraham Lincoln that we've seen and heard from some of our most celebrated icons of stage and of screen, because Lincoln himself was a great admirer of the arts. It's said he could even quote portions of "Hamlet" and "Macbeth" by heart, as we've seen here this evening. And so I somehow think this event captured an essential part of the man whose life we celebrate tonight.

Now, as commemorations take place across this country on the bicentennial of our 16th President's birth, there will be reflections on all he was and all he did for this Nation that he served. But while there are any number of moments that reveal the exceptional nature of this singular figure, there is one in particular that I want to share with you.

Not far from here stands our Nation's Capitol, a landmark familiar to us all, but one that looked very different in Lincoln's time. For it

remained unfinished until the end of the war. The laborers who built the dome came to work wondering whether each day would be their last, whether the metal they were using for its frame would be requisitioned for the war and melted down into bullets. But each day went by without any orders to halt construction, so they kept on working, and they kept on building.

When President Lincoln was finally told of all the metal being used at the Capitol, his response was short and clear: "That is as it should be." The American people needed to be reminded, he believed, that even in a time of war, the work would go on; that even when the Nation itself was in doubt, the future was being secured; and that on that distant day when the guns fell silent, a national capitol would stand, with a statue of Freedom at its peak, as a symbol of unity in the land still mending its divisions.

It is this sense of unity that is so much a part of Lincoln's legacy. For despite all that divided us—North and South, black and white—he had an unyielding belief that we were, at heart, one nation and one people. And because of Abraham Lincoln and all who've carried on his work in the generations since, that is what we remain today. And it is for that reason that we are able to gather here this evening.

Thank you, all of you, for a spectacular evening. Thank you for those who helped to

rededicate this theatre. Thank you for those who are serving this Nation. I'm very grateful to all of you. Good night.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:10 p.m.

Remarks at a Lincoln Bicentennial Celebration *February 12, 2009*

Thank you. Thank you. Please be seated. Thank you very much. Madam Speaker, Leader Reid, Members of Congress, dear friends, former colleagues, it is a great honor to be here, a place where Lincoln served, was inaugurated, and where the Nation he saved bid him a last farewell. As we mark the bicentennial of our 16th President's birth, I cannot claim to know as much about his life and works as many who are also speaking today, but I can say that I feel a special gratitude to this singular figure who in so many ways made my own story possible and in so many ways made America's story possible.

It is fitting that we are holding this celebration here at the Capitol, for the life of this building is bound ever so closely to the times of this immortal President. Built by artisans and craftsmen, but also immigrants and slaves, it was here, in the rotunda, that Union soldiers received help from a makeshift hospital; it was downstairs, in the basement, that they were baked bread to give them strength; and it was in the Senate and House chambers where they slept at night and spent some of their days.

What those soldiers saw when they looked on this building was a very different sight than the one we see today, for it remained unfinished until the end of the war. The laborers who built the dome came to work wondering each day whether that would be their last, whether the metal they were using for its frame would be requisitioned for the war and melted down into bullets. But each day went by without any orders to halt construction, and so they kept on working and kept on building.

When President Lincoln was finally told of all the metal being used here, his response was short and clear: "That is as it should be." The American people needed to be reminded, he believed, that even in a time of war, the work would go on, the people's business would continue; that even when the Nation itself was in

doubt, its future was being secured; and that on that distant day, when the guns fell silent, a national capitol would stand, with a statue of Freedom at its peak, as a symbol of unity in a land still mending its divisions.

It is this sense of unity, this ability to plan for a shared future, even at a moment where our Nation was torn apart, that I reflect on today. And while there are any number of moments that reveal that particular side of this extraordinary man, Abraham Lincoln—that particular aspect of his leadership—there's one that I'd like to share with you today.

In the war's final weeks, aboard Grant's flagship, the *River Queen*, President Lincoln was asked what was to be done with the rebel armies once General Lee surrendered. With victory at hand, Lincoln could have sought revenge. He could have forced the South to pay a steep price for their rebellion. But despite all the bloodshed and all the misery that each side had exacted upon the other, and despite his absolute certainty in the rightness of the cause of ending slavery, no Confederate soldier was to be punished, Lincoln ordered. They were to be treated, as he put it, "liberally all round." What Lincoln wanted was for Confederate troops to go back home and return to work on their farms and in their shops. He was even willing, he said, to "let them have their horses to plow and . . . their guns to shoot crows with."

That was the only way, Lincoln knew, to repair the rifts that had torn this country apart. It was the only way to begin the healing that our Nation so desperately needed. What Lincoln never forgot, not even in the midst of civil war, was that despite all that divides us—North and South, black and white—we were, at heart, one nation and one people, sharing a bond as Americans that could bend but would not break.