

got a solemn obligation to look after them when they come home. And this 9/11—post-9/11 GI bill, I think, is a great example of it. My grandfather fought in World War II, and then he got his college education on the GI bill. It wasn't just good for him. Because of that whole greatest generation going to college, that built our middle class. And all the things that we've been talking about in terms of science and technology and innovation and clean energy, all that depends on what happens in a place like Lehigh, making sure that people are being trained and constantly upgrading their skills for the future.

So that's what the GI bill's supposed to do. Now, the VA—we've actually increased the budget for the VA by 11 percent last year, which was the largest increase in 30 years, and we'll be increasing it again this year, because we think it's important to play some catchup. Rick Shinseki, who's a great American hero and now the Secretary of the VA, one of his tasks is to upgrade a bunch of the old systems in the VA.

The truth of the matter is, you shouldn't have to make a phone call. You should be able to get online. That would be more efficient. And what that tells me is—I mean, the fact that you're having to make the call tells me that we have not fully upgraded our information systems yet the way they need to be upgraded.

But he is really working diligently. We had a lot of work to do on this front. The VA had been somewhat underfunded for a number of years despite the growing amount of demand caused by returning Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. We are, I think, going to get it in a good place by the time I'm through in Washington. But in the meantime, you'll, I promise, get a return phone call.

Thank you, everybody. God bless you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:54 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to Eric E. Schmidt, chief executive officer, Google, Inc.; and President Lee Myung-bak of South Korea.

Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and President Dmitry A. Medvedev of Russia on the Expiration of the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty *December 4, 2009*

Recognizing our mutual determination to support strategic stability between the United States of America and the Russian Federation, we express our commitment, as a matter of principle, to continue to work together in the spirit of the START Treaty following its expira-

tion, as well as our firm intention to ensure that a new treaty on strategic arms enter into force at the earliest possible date.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

The President's Weekly Address *December 5, 2009*

Every month since January, when I became your President, I've spoken to you about the periodic reports of the Labor Department on the number of jobs created or lost during the previous month; numbers that tell a story about how America's economy is faring overall.

In those first months, the numbers were nothing short of devastating. The worst recession since the 1930s had wreaked havoc on the lives of so many of our fellow Americans. Yesterday the numbers released by the Labor De-

partment reflected a continuing positive trend of diminishing job loss.

But for those who were laid off last month and the millions of Americans who have lost their jobs in this recession, a good trend isn't good enough. Trends don't buy the groceries. Trends don't pay the rent or a college tuition. Trends don't fulfill the need within each of us to be productive, to provide for our families, to make the most of our lives, to reach for our dreams.

So it's true that we, as a country, are in a very different place than we were when 2009 began. Because of the Recovery Act and a number of other steps we've taken, we're no longer facing the potential collapse of our financial system or a second great depression. We're no longer losing jobs at a rate of 700,000 a month, and our economy's growing for the first time in a year.

But too many of our neighbors are still out of work because the growth we've seen hasn't yet translated into all the jobs we need. Stung by this brutal recession, businesses that have kept their doors open are still wary about adding workers. Instead of hiring, many are simply asking their employees to work more hours, or they're adding temporary help.

History tells us this is usually what happens with recessions: Even as the economy grows, it takes time for jobs to follow. But the folks who've been looking for work without any luck for months and, in some cases, years, can't wait any longer. For them, I'm determined to do everything I can to accelerate our progress so we're actually adding jobs again.

That's why this week I invited a group of business owners from all across the country to the White House to talk about additional steps we can take to help jump-start hiring. We brought together unions and universities to talk about what we can do to support our workers today and prepare our students to outcompete workers around the world tomorrow. We brought together mayors and community leaders to talk about how we can open up new opportunities in our cities and towns.

On Friday, I spent the day in Allentown, Pennsylvania, and met with workers and small-business owners there. I stopped by a steel company called Allentown Metal Works and spoke at Lehigh Community College. I visited folks at a job placement center and stopped by a shift change at Alpo. The stories and concerns I heard mirrored the countless letters I receive every single day. And they speak louder than any statistic or government report. The folks in Allentown, and in all the Allentowns across our country, are the most dedicated, productive workers in the world; all they're

asking for is a chance and a fair shake. And that's exactly what I'm working to give them.

In the coming days, I'll be unveiling additional ideas aimed at accelerating job growth and hiring as we emerge from this economic storm. And so that we don't face another crisis like this again, I am determined to meet our responsibility to do what we know will strengthen our economy in the long run. That's why I'm not going to let up in my efforts to reform our health care system, to give our children the best education in the world, to promote the jobs of tomorrow and energy independence by investing in a clean energy economy, and to deal with the mounting Federal debt.

From the moment I was sworn into office, we have taken a number of difficult steps to end this economic crisis. We didn't take them because they were popular or gratifying—they weren't. We took these steps because they were necessary. But I didn't run for President to pass emergency recovery programs or to bail out banks or to shore up auto companies. I didn't run for President simply to manage the crisis of the moment, while kicking our most pressing problems down the road. I ran for President to help hard-working families succeed and to stand up for the embattled middle class. I ran to fight for a country where responsibility is still rewarded and hard-working people can get ahead. I ran to keep faith with the sacred American principle that we will deliver to our children a future of even greater possibility.

And my commitment to you, the American people, is that I will focus every single day on how we can get people back to work, and how we can build an economy that continues to make real the promise of America for generations to come.

NOTE: The address was recorded at approximately 1:50 p.m. on December 3 in Room 236 of the Dwight D. Eisenhower Executive Office Building for broadcast on December 5. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on December 4, but was embargoed for release until 6 a.m. on December 5.

Remarks at the Kennedy Center Honors Reception December 6, 2009

The President. Thank you. On behalf of Michelle and myself, welcome to the White House.

Child in audience. Thank you.

The President. Thank you. [Laughter] This is a season of joy, tradition, and celebration.

Child in audience. Yay!

The President. Yes! [Laughter] And today it is our great joy to continue a White House holiday tradition, a celebration of performers who have transformed the arts in America, our extraordinary Kennedy Center Honorees.

We are joined by Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Members of Congress, and members of the Kennedy family. I see sprinkled through the crowd some pretty fancy company as well. You've got the Queen of Soul; you've got Martin Scorsese, he knows a little bit about filmmaking; and my spectacular First Lady is here as well.

I especially want to thank the man who created these honors more than three decades ago and who has produced them ever since—and whom I was proud to name as cochair of the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities—George Stevens, Jr.—George.

And I want to also thank Stephen Schwarzman and the Kennedy Center trustees, as well as President Michael Kaiser and all those who sustain President Kennedy's vision of a "great stage" celebrating "the best coming from this country and abroad."

These performers are indeed the best. They are also living reminders of a simple truth—and I'm going to steal a line from Michelle here—the arts are not somehow apart from our national life, the arts are at the heart of our national life.

In times of war and sacrifice, the arts and these artists remind us to sing and to laugh and to live. In times of plenty, they challenge our conscience and implore us to remember the least among us. In moments of division or doubt, they compel us to see the common values that we share, the ideals to which we aspire, even if we sometimes fall short. In days of hard-

ship, they renew our hope that brighter days are still ahead.

So let's never forget that art strengthens America. And that's why we're making sure that America strengthens its arts. It's why we're re-energizing the National Endowment of the Arts. That's why we're helping to sustain jobs in arts communities across the country. It's why we're supporting arts education in our schools, and why Michelle and I have hosted students here at the White House to experience the best of American poetry and music. And it's why we're honored to celebrate these five remarkable performers who for decades have helped to sustain and strengthen the American spirit.

You can't understand America without understanding jazz. And you can't understand jazz, without understanding Dave Brubeck. His mother was a classical pianist with high hopes for her son. And by the time he was 4, he was playing himself. But by the time he was a teenager, he was tearing up local honky-tonks. Even his mother had to admit: "There is some hope for David after all." [Laughter]

And perhaps it was World War II—his service in Patton's army—that changed his sound, forcing him, as he said, to work the war out of his system by playing some "pretty vicious piano." Whatever it was, his sound, the distinctive harmonies and improvisations of the Dave Brubeck Quartet, would change jazz forever, prompting Time magazine to put him on the cover as the leader of a new jazz age.

Having brought jazz into the mainstream, he then transformed it with innovative new rhythms on albums like "Time Out," the first jazz album to ever sell more than a million copies and still one of the best-selling jazz albums of all time.

Dave Brubeck has never stopped reaching new audiences: performing for Presidents from Johnson to Reagan, composing orchestral tributes to Martin Luther King and Pope John Paul II, and even in his eighties, dazzling jazz festivals across America.

And I know personally how powerful his performances can be. I mentioned this to Dave