

beginning to provide basic services by restoring infrastructure such as roads, clinics, and schools and lights and water, things that our people have been deprived of for more than two decades.

And we're also establishing the rule of law and governance. Freedoms—we say today that all freedoms, basic fundamental freedoms, are allowed in the country. And we're very proud of that.

We have challenges, and I'll be the first to admit that—challenges in national capacity because most of our brains left the country. I want to thank you for your approval of the DED that extended them for 18 months, allowing them to stay a little bit while we prepare to receive them. Corruption, the rule of law, our judiciary system and its weakness, unemployment among the many young who did not have the opportunity to go to school, who knew only war and violence in their young days—but those challenges we see as the ones that we have to tackle. And the progress we have made enable us to have the commitment and capacity to meet those challenges.

I want you to know that the United States has been a great partner to us. We could not have achieved the progress that we have had if we had not had the support in those initial days when we were just scrambling and looking for the ways to be able to go forward. The U.S. was there as a great partner.

And so the administration, as well as the Congress, have been very supportive of us. It has continued through these 4 years. And I'm just here to say that the return on your investment is beginning to come. We hope that that return will be even greater in the next few years when we consolidate the peace and when we are able to deliver basic services to our people.

I bring you greetings on behalf of the Liberian people.

*President Obama.* Excellent. Well, thank you so much. Thank you, everybody. Thank you, guys.

NOTE: The President spoke at 3:26 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. President Johnson Sirleaf referred to DED, the deferred enforced departure protection status for Liberians in the United States.

## Remarks at a Reception Celebrating Jewish American Heritage Month May 27, 2010

Thank you so much. It is wonderful to see all of you, and I am proud to welcome you to the first ever event held at the White House to honor Jewish American Heritage Month.

This is a pretty fancy group here, pretty distinguished group. We've got Senators and Representatives. We've got Supreme Court Justices and successful entrepreneurs, rabbinical scholars, Olympic athletes, and Sandy Koufax. Sandy and I actually have something in common: We are both lefties. [*Laughter*] He can't pitch on Yom Kippur; I can't pitch. [*Laughter*]

I'm looking forward to the reading by Rabbi Alysa Stanton, the performance by Regina Spektor.

I know that my Chief of Staff, Rahm Emanuel, wanted to be here, but as some of you

know, he is in Israel for the Bar Mitzvah of his son, and which is—

The diversity of talents and accomplishments represented in this room underscores the vast contributions that Jewish Americans have made to this country. Of course, it's impossible to separate the achievements of Jewish Americans from the struggles of Jewish people around the world. Even before we were a nation, we were a sanctuary for Jews seeking to live without the specter of violence or exile. That's what drew a band of 23 Jewish refugees to a place called New Amsterdam more than 350 years ago. That's what brought Jewish immigrants, fleeing pogroms, on a long journey to America in the last turn of the century. And that's what led Holocaust survivors and Jews trapped behind the Iron Curtain to travel to these shores to rebuild their lives.

As Jews sought freedom and opportunity in America, these waves of immigrants and generations that followed have helped to make America what it is—richer, stronger, more prosperous—from the discoveries of Jonas Salk to the pioneering work of Albert Einstein; from the music of Irving Berlin to the poetry of Emma Lazarus. And then there are the countless names that we don't know—the teachers, the small business owners, the doctors and nurses, the people who seek only to live honestly and faithfully, and to give their children more than they had. Jewish Americans have always been a critical part of the American story.

These contributions have not always been embraced. Jewish communities have at times faced hardship and hostility—right here in the United States of America—a reminder that we have to respond, at all times, swiftly and firmly whenever bigotry rears its ugly head. But no matter what the obstacles, Jewish Americans have endured, learning from each other, leaning on each other, true to their faith, leaning on the values that have been associated for so long with Jewish history: a sense of community, a sense of moral purpose, and an ethic of responsibility.

So it's heartening to know that these are the enduring values of a history marked by so much tragedy—not cynicism or despair, not callous indifference. Every person in this room knows somebody—perhaps a mother or father, an aunt, an uncle, perhaps yourself—who exemplifies this heritage. Every person in this room stands at the end of an unbroken chain of perseverance, of a conviction that a better future is possible. That doesn't just offer a lesson to Jewish Americans, it offers a lesson to all Americans. And ultimately, that is what we are celebrating today.

Yes, Jewish Americans have garnered success in industry and in government, as we can see by the guests gathered here today. Yes, Jews have helped to pioneer incredible advances in science and medicine, across countless fields. But the contributions of the Jewish community to America run deeper. As a product of history and faith, Jewish Americans have helped to open our eyes to injustice, to people in need, and to the simple idea that we ought to recog-

nize ourselves in the struggles of our fellow men and women.

That's what's led Jewish advocates to fight for women's equality and workers' rights. That's what led rabbis to preach against racism from the *bimah* and to lead congregants on marches and protests to stop segregation. And that is what helped lead America to recognize and support Israel as a Jewish homeland and a beacon for democratic values, beginning mere minutes after its independence was declared. In fact, we have the original statement by President Harry Truman on display here today.

So what we are called upon to do now is to continue to live up to those values as a nation, to continue to uphold the principle of *tikkun olam*, our obligation to "repair the world." Here at home, at a time of continuing struggle for millions of families, it is incumbent upon us to remain focused not only on rebuilding our economy, but rebuilding it stronger than before. And I'd note that our efforts are bolstered by the work of so many Jewish organizations that help the sick and educate our children and provide assistance to seniors and others in need.

But our responsibility doesn't end at the water's edge. That's why my administration is renewing American leadership around the world, strengthening old alliances and forging new ones, defending universal values while ensuring that we uphold our values here at home. In fact, it's our common values that leads us to stand with allies and friends, including the State of Israel. That's why, even as we never waver in pursuing peace—

[At this point, a pager went off in the audience.]

That happens to me all the time. [Laughter]

That is why, even as we never waver in pursuing peace between Israelis, Palestinians, and Arabs, our bond with Israel is unbreakable. It is the bond of two peoples that share a commitment to a common set of ideals: opportunity, democracy, and freedom.

Those ideals are what have drawn generations to these shores. Those ideals are what have allowed Jewish immigrants to seek a better life in America, while enriching the life of our country. And those ideals are what you and all

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Jewish Americans continue to help us uphold each and every day.

So thank you. God bless you, and may God bless the United States of America.

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:27 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks,

he referred to former Brooklyn/Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Sanford “Sandy” Koufax; Rabbi Alysa Stanton of Congregation Bayt Shalom in Greenville, NC; and entertainer Regina I. Spektor. The related proclamation of April 30 is listed in Appendix D at the end of this volume.

## Statement on the Death of John W. Finn

*May 27, 2010*

Michelle and I were deeply saddened to learn of the passing of retired Navy Lt. John William Finn, the oldest living Medal of Honor recipient. Our thoughts and prayers are with his family and loved ones at this time. Lt. Finn received the medal for the heroism he displayed during the attack on Pearl Harbor. Under a torrent of gunfire, Lt. Finn defended his fellow sailors, holding his position for 2 hours until the skies went quiet, despite suffering serious wounds. Like many of those who have served our Nation with such distinction, Lt. Finn often said that he never intend-

ed to be a hero. Instead, he felt that he was simply doing his duty. But his modesty does not diminish his extraordinary conduct or the incredible example he has set for our men and women in uniform and for all Americans. I had the privilege of meeting Lt. Finn last year, and I was struck by his warmth and humility. As we mark Memorial Day, and pay tribute all who have fallen in defense of this Nation, the passing of Lt. Finn is a reminder of the sacrifices that generations have made to preserve the freedoms we hold dear.

## Statement on Congressional Action on the Department of Defense’s “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” Policy

*May 27, 2010*

I have long advocated that we repeal “don’t ask, don’t tell,” and I am pleased that both the House of Representatives and the Senate Armed Services Committee took important bipartisan steps toward repeal tonight. Key to successful repeal will be the ongoing Defense Department review, and as such I am grateful that the amendments offered by Representative Patrick Murphy and Senators Joseph Lieberman and Carl Levin that passed today will ensure that the Department of Defense can

complete that comprehensive review that will allow our military and their families the opportunity to inform and shape the implementation process. Our military is made up of the best and bravest men and women in our Nation, and my greatest honor is leading them as Commander in Chief. This legislation will help make our Armed Forces even stronger and more inclusive by allowing gay and lesbian soldiers to serve honestly and with integrity.