

to be a partner for all of you in being responsive to your constituencies.

Now, I will confess that there are going to be times where we do believe that having basic national standards are going to be important, that there are certain things that we as a country, we as a people, aspire to, and that we need to maintain some consistency across the States. But for the most part, if there are going to be—if there's going to be experimentation, if States are going to continue to be laboratories for democracy, that's something that we welcome and embrace.

And so if you have ideas around any of the issues that my Cabinet members who are here are responsible for, I guarantee you will get a serious response from them in terms of how we can work together.

So to sum up my initial remarks, I heard—I overheard Joe say that he will always take your call. I promise you, he will be calling you. At a certain point you may say, “Golly, it's Biden again.” [Laughter] But I think the same is going to be true for Valerie Jarrett, who heads up our intergovernmental affairs. The same is going to be true for our various Cabinet officials. They are going to want to hear from you.

And the one thing that I would urge is, don't wait until you're really mad about something before you call us. We'd prefer not to read about it in the press. [Laughter] We'd rather you call us ahead of time and say, you know what, we think this isn't working. We think this is a better way of doing things. And we'll work with you. And if we don't agree with you, we will spell out in great detail why we don't agree with you. And it's not going to be based on ideology, it's not going to be based on partisanship, it will be based upon our best judgment about

how we move forward with the policy objectives that we all share.

And if we end up disagreeing on something, I promise you we will not be disagreeable about it. And we will keep on working until, hopefully, we can figure out a way to solve problems.

In the end, I think that's what this most recent election was all about. People are frustrated, understandably, with an economy that has stalled and is not doing as well as it should for American families. And that was true not just during this crisis, but it was true for the decade before this crisis. And I think what the American people are expecting from all of us is that—not that we suddenly put aside politics, not that we put aside principles, because everybody here is driven oftentimes with some very strongly held principles about what America should be and how we can move forward, but that at a certain point we also concern ourselves with governing and delivering for them.

And I know of no group of people who more consistently steer in that direction than Governors, because ultimately the buck stops with you in your State, just as the buck stops with me at the national level.

And so I look forward to working with you, and I look forward to seeing you again fairly soon. We usually host a Governors' bash early in the year, and that way I'll have a chance to meet all your spouses and you guys will get dressed up and look really good. [Laughter]

All right? Okay. With that, we're going to clear the press out of the room so that all these folks can be—tell me what they really think about me. [Laughter]

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:04 p.m. in the Blair House. The transcript released by the Office of the Press Secretary also included the remarks of Vice President Joe Biden.

## Remarks on Lighting the Hanukkah Menorah December 2, 2010

*The President.* Oh, this is a good-looking group right here. [Laughter] Good evening, everybody.

*Audience members.* Good evening.

*The President.* Welcome to the White House. I want to thank all of you for joining us in celebrating the second night of Hanukkah. Happy Hanukkah, everybody.

We are joined tonight by Ambassador Michael Oren of Israel. Where's Michael? He's way back there. And so I want to begin by offering our deepest condolences to the families and loved ones of all of those who've died as a result of the terrible forest fire in northern Israel.

As rescuers and firefighters continue in their work, the United States is acting to help our Israeli friends respond to the disaster. A short while ago, our Ambassador in Tel Aviv, Jim Cunningham, issued a disaster declaration which has launched an effort across the U.S. Government to identify the firefighting assistance we have available and provide it to Israel as quickly as possible. Of course, that's what friends do for each other.

And, Mr. Ambassador, our thoughts and prayers are with everybody in Israel who is affected by this tragedy and the family and loved ones of those in harm's way.

Tonight it's an honor to welcome so many friends and leaders from the Jewish community and beyond. And I want to start by recognizing my Special Envoy for Middle East Peace, George Mitchell, who is here. Please give him a round of applause, and all the other outstanding members of the diplomatic corps who are here.

One third of the Supreme Court is here. One of my favorites, Justice Ginsburg, is hiding out here in the front. *[Laughter]* She really is here. It's hard to see. *[Laughter]* Justice Breyer is here. And—where's Justice Breyer? There he is right here. And our newest addition and former colleague of mine when we were teaching together, Elena Kagan is in the house.

I want to also acknowledge somebody who I rely on day in, day out, who is not only a great Vice President, but is also—*[laughter]*—one of my dearest friends, Joe Biden is in the house.

And to all the members of the administration and Members of Congress and all the State and local leaders who are with us today, welcome. I want to thank Joshua Redman for gracing us with his talent and helping us with the music. And finally, I want to thank the rabbis and lay leaders who have traveled from all over the country to be here. Yes, you can give yourselves a round of applause.

Now, tonight we gather to celebrate a story as simple as it is timeless. It's a story of ancient Israel, suffering under the yoke of empire, where Jews were forbidden to practice their religion openly and the Holy Temple, including the Holy of Holies, had been desecrated.

It was then that a small band of believers, led by Judah Maccabee, rose up to take back their city and free their people. And when the Maccabees entered the temple, the oil that should have lasted for a single night ended up burning for eight.

That miracle gave hope to all those who had been struggling in despair. And in the 2,000 years since, in every corner of the world, the tiny candles of Hanukkah have reminded us of the importance of faith and perseverance. They have illuminated a path for us when the way forward was shrouded in darkness.

And as we prepare to light another candle on the menorah, let us remember the sacrifices that others have made so that we may all be free. Let us pray for the members of our military who guard that freedom every day and who may be spending this holiday far away from home.

Let us also think of those for whom these candles represent not just a triumph of the past, but also hope for the future: the men, women, and children of all faiths who still suffer under tyranny and oppression.

That's why families everywhere are taught to place the menorah in public view, so the entire world can see its light. Because, as the Talmud teaches us, "So long as a person still has life, they should never abandon faith."

Now, the menorah we're using tonight, and the family who is going to help us light it, both stand as powerful symbols of that faith.

This beautiful menorah has been generously loaned to us by Congregation Beth Israel in New Orleans. Five years ago, when Hurricane Katrina hit, the synagogue was covered in 8 feet of water. Later, as the cleanup crew dug through the rubble, they discovered this menorah caked in dirt and mold. And today it stands as a reminder of the tragedy and a source of inspiration for the future.

And that feeling is shared by Susan Retik. It's a feeling they know all too well. After her husband David was killed on September 11th, Susan could have easily lost herself in feelings of hopelessness and grief. But instead, she turned her personal loss into a humanitarian mission, cofounding Beyond the 11th, a group that reaches out to Afghan widows facing their own struggles.

So on this second night of Hanukkah, let us give thanks to the blessings that all of us enjoy. Let us be mindful of those who need our prayers. And let us draw strength from the words of a great philosopher who said that a miracle is "a confirmation of what is possible."

And now I'd like to turn it over to Susan, who, by the way, has been on this stage before, receiving a Presidential award for her outstanding work. But she happens to be joined by a beautiful family: Donald, Ben, Molly, Dina, and Rebecca. [Laughter] Rebecca is down here. So I want to turn—there she is.

*Audience members.* Aww!

*The President.* Yes, she is adorable. [Laughter] As Michelle said as we were getting on stage, she will be stealing the show. [Laughter] So we're going to turn it over to Susan and her family for the blessings.

[At this point, a blessing was offered, and the menorah was lit. Afterwards, saxophonist Joshua Redman performed a Hanukkah song. Some members of the audience sang along.]

*The President.* So happy Hanukkah to all of you. We're going to see most of you downstairs. Be patient in the line. [Laughter] And I just want to let everybody know that, yes, they will be able to Photoshop my lip for the picture. [Laughter] Happy Hanukkah, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 6:44 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Donald Ger, husband of Susan Retik, and their children Benjamin Retik, Molly Retik, Dina Retik, and Rebecca Ger.

## Statement on the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform Report

December 3, 2010

I want to thank the members of the National Commission on Fiscal Responsibility and Reform for their important work in highlighting the magnitude of the challenge before us and outlining an array of options to confront it. Jobs and growth are our most urgent need. But if we want an America that can compete for the jobs of tomorrow, we simply cannot allow our Nation to be dragged down by our debt. We must correct our fiscal course.

Nothing would be more valuable to addressing this challenge than strong, sustained economic growth. But the Commission's report underscores that to sustain growth in the medium and long term we need to face some difficult choices to curb runaway debt. It will require cutting the spending we don't need in order to invest in what's necessary to grow our economy and our middle class. It will require all of us, Democrats and Republicans, to find common

ground without compromising the fundamental principles we hold dear. Because the undeniable fact is that no one party can successfully tackle this challenge alone.

Chairmen Bowles and Simpson met the charge that I gave them and the Commission: to bring our deficits down in the medium term and to meaningfully improve our long-run fiscal situation so that we can keep commitments made to future generations. The Commission's majority report includes a number of specific proposals that I, along with my economic team, will study closely in the coming weeks as we develop our budget and our priorities for the coming year. This morning, my budget director, Jack Lew, spoke with Chairman Bowles and invited the entire Commission in to meet with him and Secretary Geithner to discuss the Commission's proposals. Overall, my goal is to build on the steps we've already taken to reduce